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Chris Ward, Minister
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Growing With Books

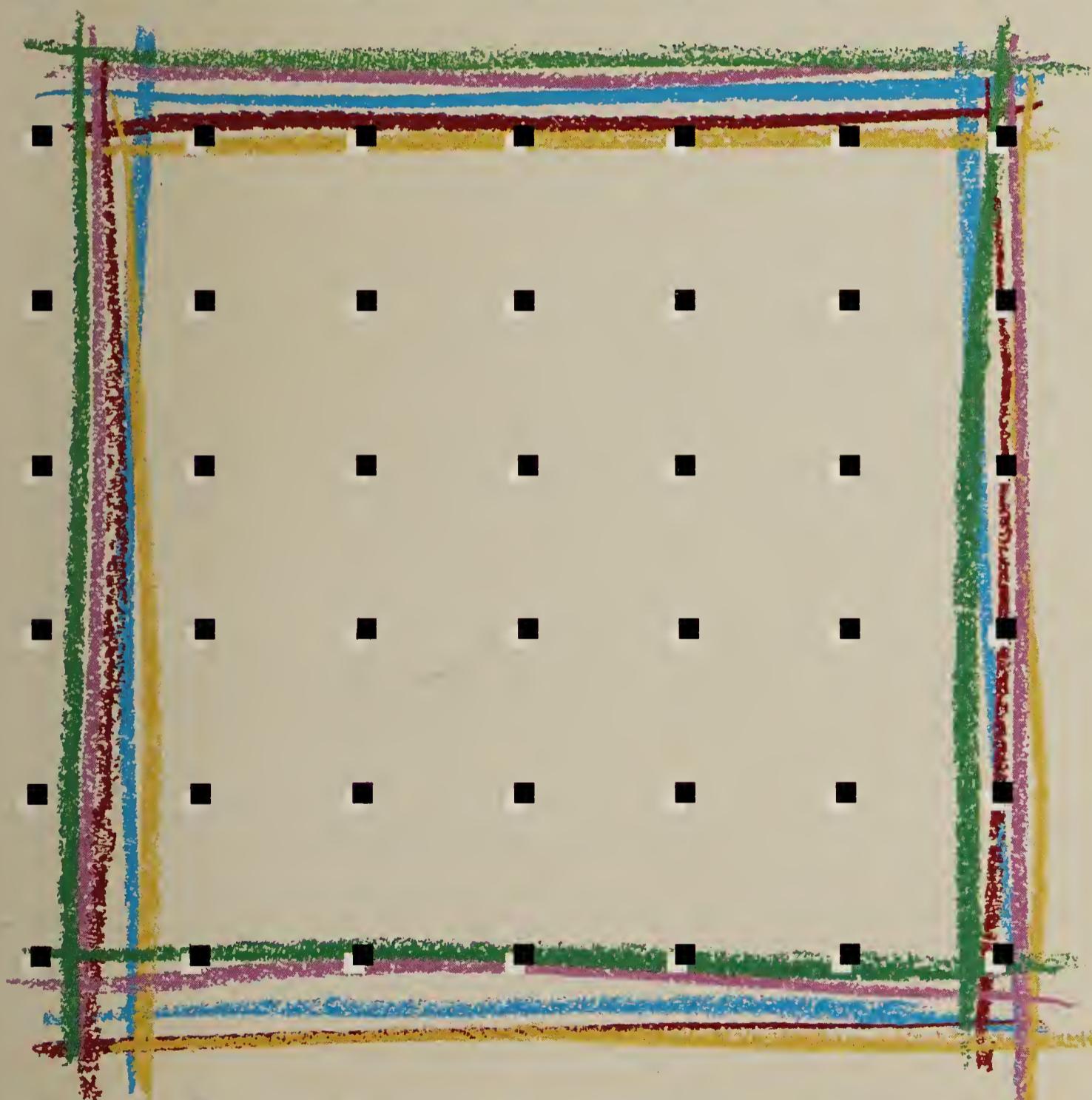
Children's Literature

in the Formative Years and Beyond

Resource

Guide

1988



Book 1: Literature and Education

Book 2: Who Is Children's Literature For?

Book 3: About Poetry

Book 4: Reading, Talking, and Writing

Book 5: Books to Grow With



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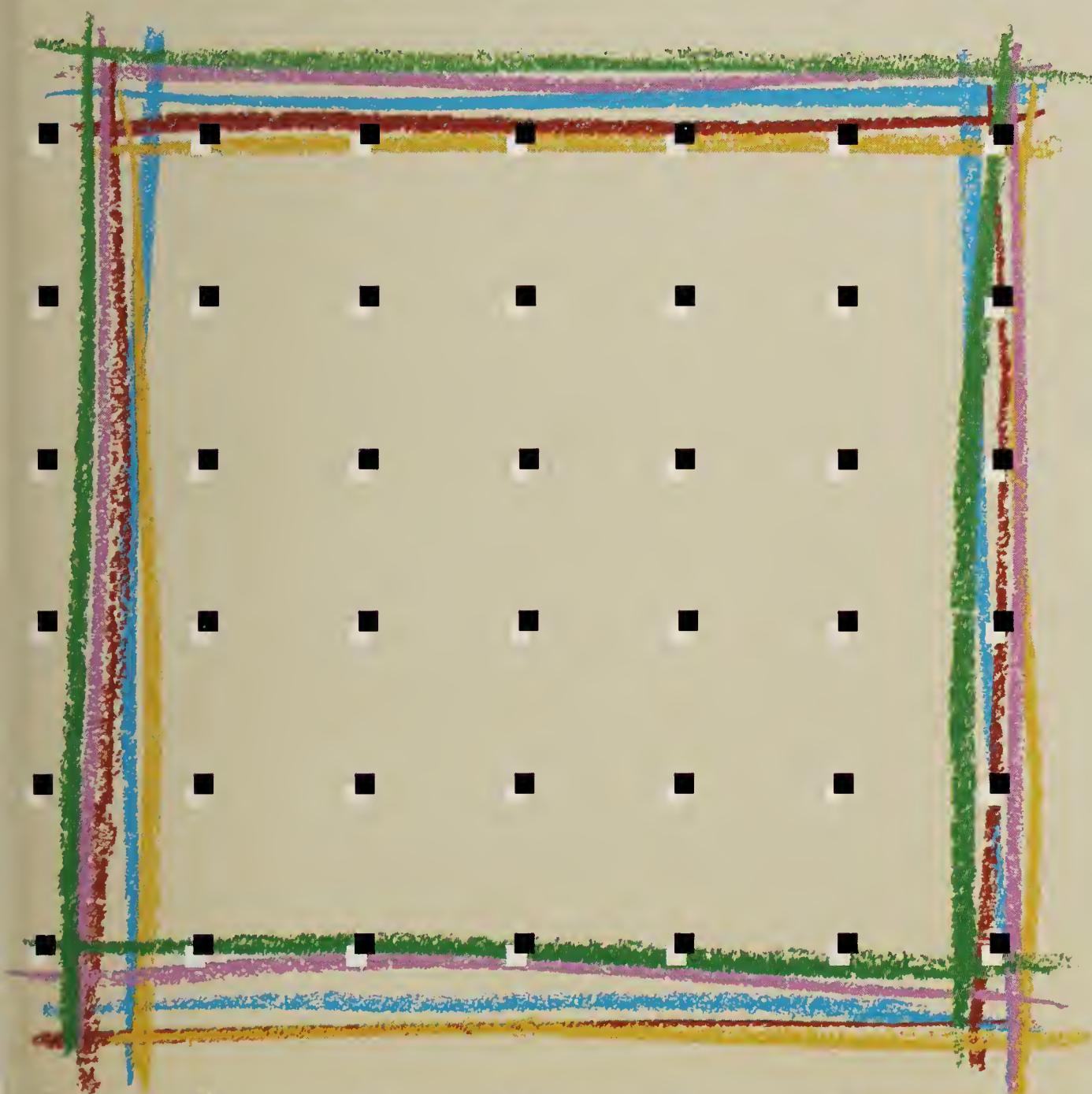
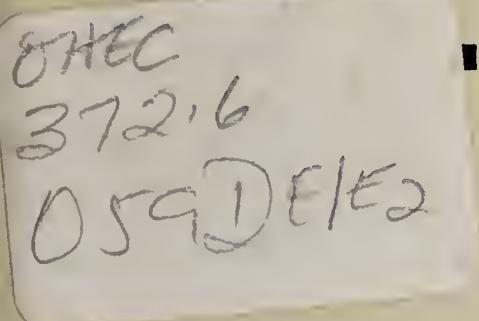
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Lissa Paul
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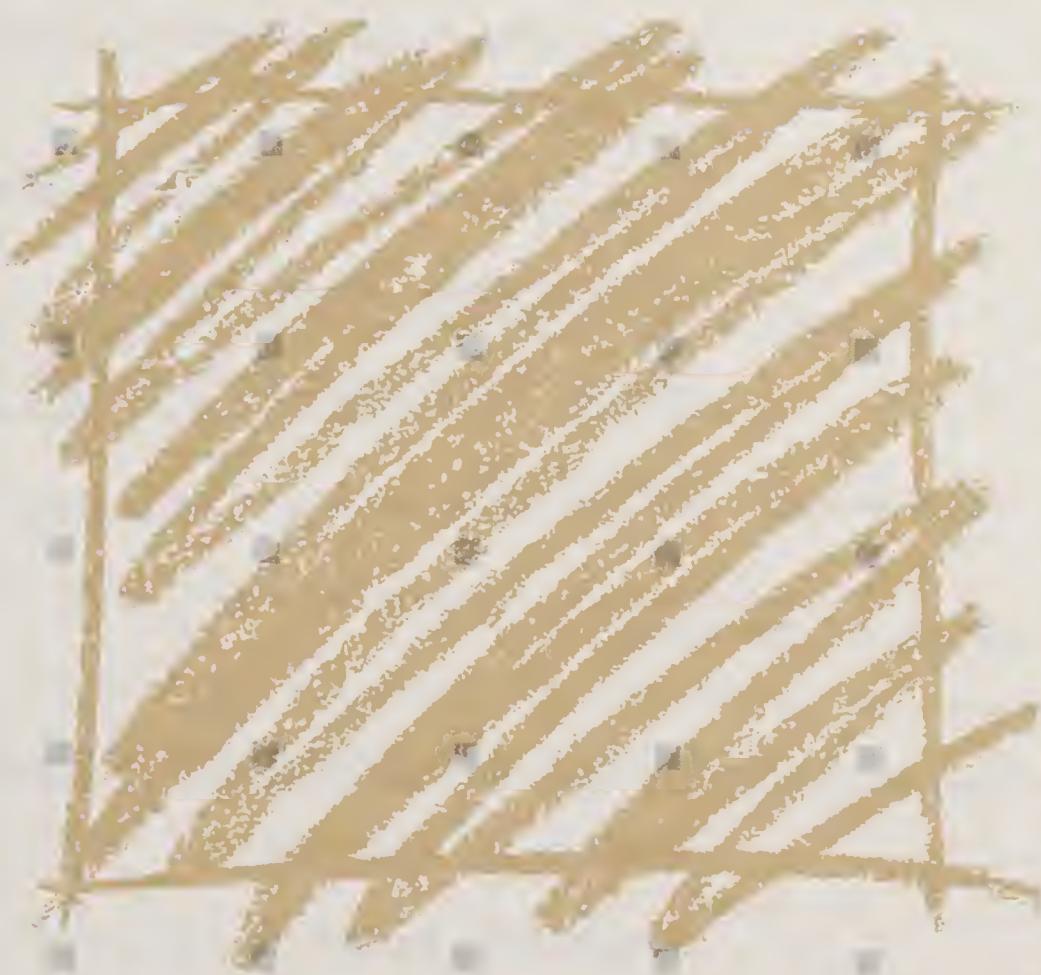
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The Five Books





The Five Books

Book 1 Literature and Education

Prologue: What Stories Have to Do With Life *Lissa Paul*

Stories Are for Understanding *Gordon Wells*

Myth, Legend, and Fairy Tale: “Serious Statements About Our Existence” *Johan Lyall Aitken*

Epilogue: Life and Literature in the Classroom *Lissa Paul*

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Book 2 Who Is Children’s Literature For?

Prologue: Children’s Literature Is Not Just for Children – It’s for Grown-ups, Too *Lissa Paul*

Our Own Words and the Words of Others, Part 1 *David Booth and Jo Phenix*

Cross-Age Tutoring in Writing *Beverley Allinson*

Six Magic Words *Brenda Protheroe*

Epilogue: Share, Listen, Mediate *Lissa Paul*

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Book 3 About Poetry

Prologue: What About Poetry? *Lissa Paul*

Inside Poetry *Lissa Paul*

Poem As Car *Diane Dawber*

Epilogue: Poetry As Something You Want to Do, Not Something You Have to Do *Lissa Paul*

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Book 4 Reading, Talking, and Writing

Prologue: How Story Readers Become Story Makers *Lissa Paul*

Reading to Children *Joan McGrath*

Storybook Reading and Literacy: Children's Responses to Stories
Paul Shaw

"Would You Rather . . .": Looking at Drama and Story *David Booth*

Epilogue: The Reader in the Story *Lissa Paul*

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Book 5 Books to Grow With

Prologue: Finding Books and Deciding What to Read *Lissa Paul*

Finding the Right Book at the Right Time *Judy Sarick*

Teaching Beginning Reading With Children's Books *Barbara Park*

Canadian Novels in the Junior Classroom *Joan McGrath*

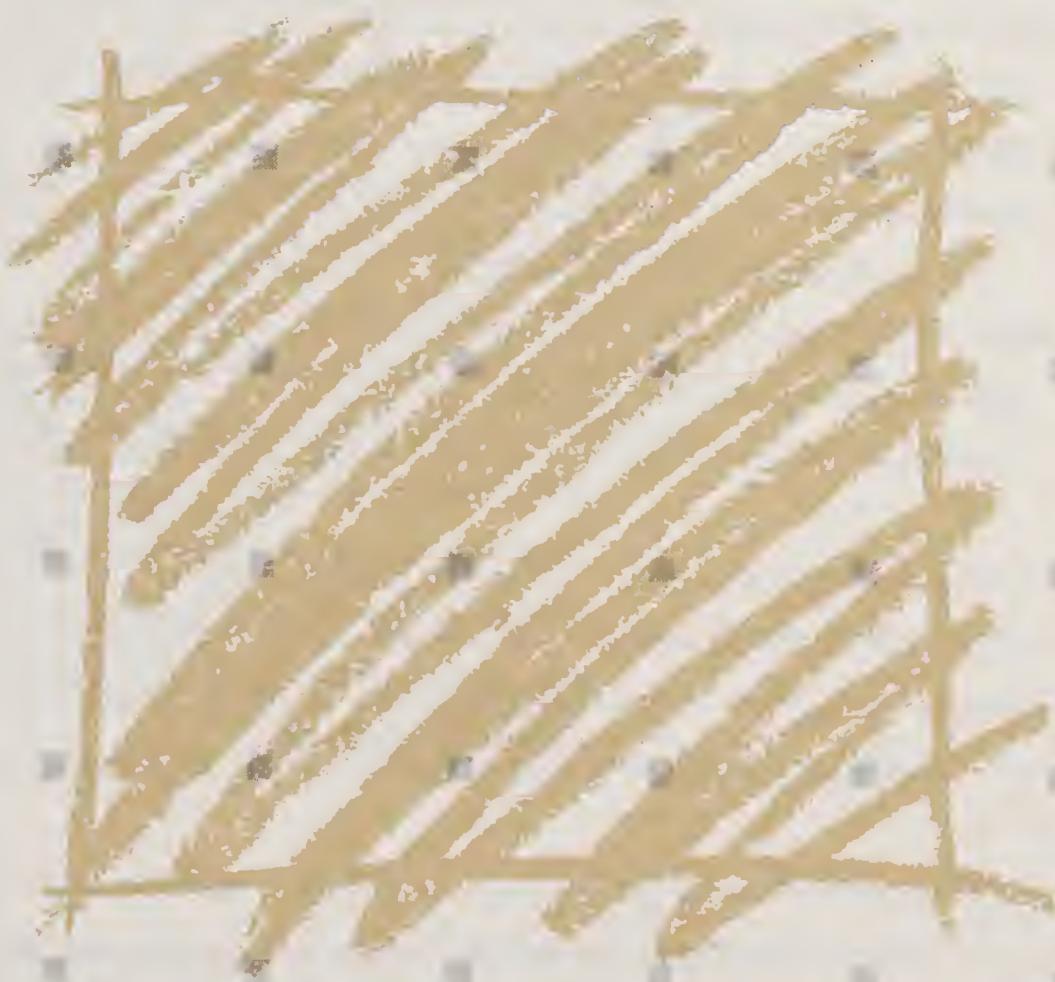
Canadian Magazines in the Classroom *Kathy Lowinger*

Our Own Words and the Words of Others, Part 2 *David Booth and Larry Swartz*

Epilogue: For the Love of Language *Lissa Paul*

Bibliography

General Preface



General Preface

For generations parents and teachers have enjoyed reading aloud to children and have witnessed the wonderful power of “story”, or narrative forms of literature, to engage and entrance – and inform and transform – the imaginations of their children. Extensive studies in early literacy development have confirmed such observations of the influence of story and have extended our understanding of the crucial role the use of literature plays in providing meaningful models and demonstrations of reading, writing, and thinking.

Yet experience with literature, and specifically the concept of story, provides more for the young learner than imaginative pleasure. In a recent project funded by the Ministry of Education,¹ Edgar Wright and Rosemary Young found that background experience with story significantly contributed to academic achievement. When children have had the benefit of rich experiences with good literature, they come to all reading and writing encounters in school with an enhanced background knowledge of language. It is not surprising that increasing numbers of teachers are now exploring new ways of making literature a central part of their language arts program.

As a resource document, *Growing With Books* confirms the basic tenets about learners and learning set out in the Ministry of Education’s policy document *The Formative Years*.² *Growing With Books* reflects a changing understanding and renewed appreciation of language, learning, and literacy development, based on the following premises:

- Shared and interactive experiences with literature encourage the development of active and participating skilled readers and writers.
- A wide range of opportunities to respond to literature through reading, writing, speaking, and drama fosters proficiency in communication and thinking.

1. E.N. Wright and R.E. Young, *Arts in Education. The Use of Drama and Narrative: A Study of Outcomes* (Toronto: Ministry of Education, Ontario, 1986).

2. Ministry of Education, Ontario, *The Formative Years: Provincial Curriculum Policy for the Primary and Junior Divisions of the Public and Separate Schools of Ontario* (Toronto: Ministry of Education, Ontario, 1975).

- All phases of the teaching-learning process promote effective listening, sharing, and mediation through interaction and collaboration.
- Evaluation of progress is ongoing and formative, and is an integral part of all phases of the learning process.

Growing With Books is a practical collection of “books” or stories written by some of Ontario’s most respected practising experts (teachers, librarians, storytellers, poets, consultants, administrators, and researchers). Each contribution in the collection speaks with a unique voice: ideas and theories are woven together with practical suggestions that teachers can use in their classrooms. While each author presents a personal point of view on a particular aspect, all authors express the same message: to grow as a literate, thinking person, one needs to grow with books.

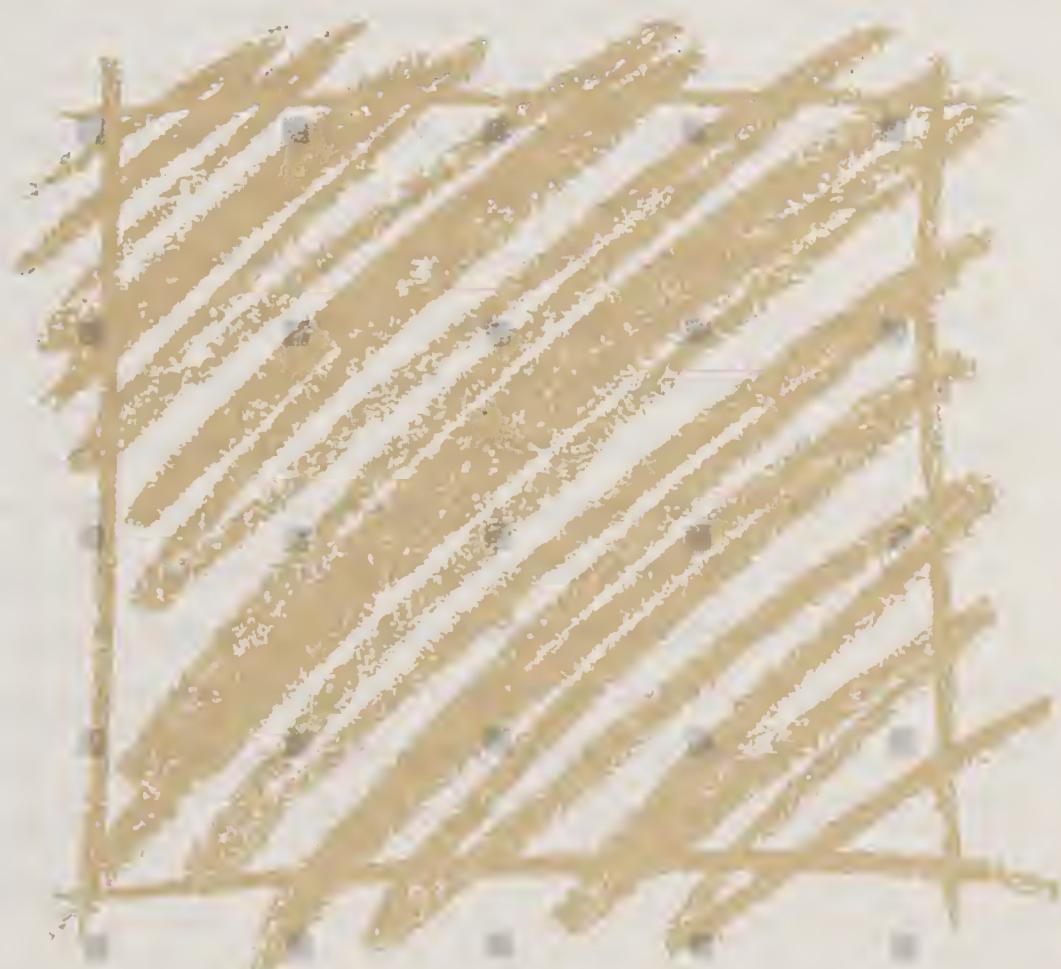
Growing With Books is not intended to be a prescriptive teacher’s manual as much as an invitation to the novice and experienced educator alike to read and actively explore a variety of strategies for the use of high-quality literature throughout the Primary and Junior Divisions, and beyond. Suggested titles in the reference lists and bibliographies have been chosen because they have a timeless appeal and because they respond to a broad range of interests and needs. Instructional decisions involving the suitability of an individual piece of literature should be approached with sensitivity. As always, teachers will continue to select literature on the basis of its literary merit and its thematic appeal. Should any controversial issues emerge, informed teachers will always seek to engage children in positive, thought-provoking discussions of such issues within their cultural and historical context.

Growing With Books is a document that will be enjoyed, sampled, explored, and used in daily practice. It will provide a resource for ongoing school-based dialogue between principals and their staff and for communication with parents, trustees, and other interested members of the community.

Growing With Books is dedicated to those who love language. It is for all those who believe that literature and story are central to a growing awareness of what it means to be literate in our culture.

General Prologue:

The Beginning



General Prologue: The Beginning

Lissa Paul

What do you do when a child looks up at you and says, “This is the best book I ever read. Do you have any more like it?” How do you know what it is about the story that has touched that child so deeply? Is the child looking for a story about redemption? Outwitting grown-ups? Animals? Magic? Happy families? Monsters? Adventures? Is the child looking for a fantastic or foreign landscape? Or a familiar one? For a story with exquisite and strange language? Or one with the dialect and characters of a home left behind? The range of possibilities is bewildering – as you probably know all too well.

Growing With Books suggests ways for you, as reader and teacher, to respond to the needs of the child’s simple, direct question; to talk about stories in a language that brings you, the child, and the book closer together; to share with the children in your class a love of stories and poems; to help them learn to write as well as read – to become authors themselves; and to encourage them to explore a spectrum of responses to stories, rather than look for a single “right” answer.

This is a story about stories – not as something to be confined to the classroom but as they live and grow in our minds, as we live and grow in the world. It is only in childhood, as Graham Greene says in “The Lost Childhood”, that stories “have any deep influence on our lives”.¹ Like Greene, the authors of *Growing With Books* know that children’s literature is important because what we read as children becomes part of the landscape of our grown-up minds.

The contributors to this collection write from a social context that is constantly changing our images of children and childhood. They know that it is no longer possible to shelter children from the vagaries of life. On any weekend, children and their parents can be found wearing the same kinds of jeans, T-shirts, and running shoes, watching the same programs on television, and pursuing the same trivial board games. Children

1. G. Greene, “The Lost Childhood”, in *Collected Essays* (Harmondsworth, Mx.: Penguin Books, 1970), p. 13.

cannot be seen as innocent any more, either. They know (or claim to) many adult secrets they would have been sheltered from as little as a generation ago. Today, even very young children have access to the six o'clock news as well as "Mr. Dressup", and to the daytime soaps as well as "Passe Partout".

In sharing language, styles of dress, and games with their elders, contemporary children are a lot like their medieval counterparts. Instead of seeing children and grown-ups as distinct from each other (as society has for about four hundred years) we now think of children as people who grow up. Children experience the world in relation to the one that grown-ups inhabit; and grown-ups know that their adult lives are formed by how they experienced the world as children. Child and adult are interdependent. There is no sudden, complete metamorphosis from caterpillar to butterfly.

The authors of *Growing With Books* speak eloquently about the help stories can provide to both children and adults in charting a course through a mass of shifting sensibilities and the ways in which children and adults can explore stories together. Reading is not simply the act of decoding letters on a page or an exercise in comprehension: "it involves searching for patterns of meaning, problem-solving, analysis, judgement, evaluation, and synthesis."²

Growing With Books is not an instruction manual. Readers find meanings in stories more readily in conversations with each other than through listening to lectures. The articles presented here offer practical, effective ways of sharing books of poetry, prose, and drama, the literature of oral tradition, and books of information. The authors have *listened* to the children with whom they work and they know how to interpret the children's responses. As you read about their approaches, be aware that a writer's attitude may be more important than his or her methodology. Listen to the multiplicity of voices and choose the ones that resonate for you.

2. Ministry of Education, Ontario, *Education in the Primary and Junior Divisions* (Toronto: Ministry of Education, Ontario, 1975), p. 42.

Share. Stories are for sharing. The image of the tall teacher handing down the right answers to tidy rows of little children seated at their desks is fading from the classroom.

Answers often kill interpretation. Questions are much more useful and interesting, though humans generally prefer “enigmas to muddles” as the critic Frank Kermode says in a book about secrets.³ Questions seem to promise the existence of answers, of truths – if only we could figure out how to find them. Alice in Wonderland says something similar when she thinks she can answer the Mad Hatter’s riddle about why a raven is like a writing desk. Alice is pleased when the tea-party conversation turns to something sensible – like riddles. At last, she believes, she will be able to “find out the answer”. Riddles are supposed to have answers, so she assumes she can work out the right one. But the Mad Hatter subverts her belief: he hasn’t “the slightest idea” what the answer is.

Stories are worth exploring even if there are no absolutely right interpretations of them. Child and adult ought to explore stories together, the adult approaching the story in the same spirit of discovery as the child.

If a story doesn’t leave us with something to think about – something to puzzle over, something unsolved or unresolved – it is a good bet that the story is not a work of literature. It may be something to read – so are cereal boxes, weather reports, and hockey scores – but it is not a work of imaginative literature. As a teacher you don’t have to be able to explain what a story is about. A story, unlike a cereal box, is more than the sum of its words.

The principle behind sharing is to help the naïve reader find clues to the ways stories work, to develop techniques of reading, and to explore a variety of answers, not just the “right” ones.

3. F. Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 49.

Listen. Children have open, unconditioned responses to what they read. Listen to those responses.

The way children solve computer problems shows this. They experiment with a variety of solutions and put their imaginations to work exploring options and testing out a range of possible solutions – unlike adults who are not likely to try unfamiliar computer problems in the first place (at least not until they have been told the “right” way to do them). Unconditioned responses often turn out to be the more original, interesting, and insightful ones, and children bring that freshness to stories, as well as to computer problems.

Mediate. As well as listening and sharing, the teacher mediates between the child and the book. That means helping children develop language and familiarity with the narrative conventions (genre, structure, style, narrative voice) that make stories. It also means helping them read the language of pictures. This is especially important for new readers because picture books are usually the first stories they encounter.

In your role as mediator, focus on the points in the story that arouse your interest and your curiosity; the emotions, thoughts, wishes, dreams, beliefs, and values that you want to share. Listen attentively to the kinds of clues that the children give about what interests them. We must trust the children to take from the story what is important to them. Adults don’t know all the answers; and children know we don’t know. That does not mean we abandon the search. It means that we look – together.

Note on Organization

The contributors to this resource guide care about children and about what children read: they are classroom teachers, academics, booksellers, poets, critics, and book promoters. Taken together the five books tell a story about stories; but each is also self-contained. The prologue and epilogue to each book analyse some of the issues raised and suggest ways to bring those ideas into the classroom.

Reference Lists

The lists of books at the end of articles are intended as quick reference guides; the selections reflect the books that were in the authors' minds at the time of writing. The authors have recommended books that contain a balance of social, literary, cultural, and historical content. But a story is more than the sum of its parts. The selection decisions were based on a host of considerations (all demanding precedence) from individual preferences, to feelings about how the books on the list related to each other, to the desire both to include comfortable favourites and to reveal something new.

General Epilogue:

“In My End Is My Beginning”



*General Epilogue: “In My End Is My Beginning”*¹

Lissa Paul

The first question is still to be asked: “What is a story?” The question looks simple enough. The Oxford English Dictionary says, among its definitions, that a story is “a recital of events that have or are alleged to have happened; a narrative designed for the entertainment of a hearer or reader”. But that definition says little. It doesn’t account for the persistence and vitality of stories.

Growing With Books is about the humanity of stories. It is about the power of imagination and the power of imaginative literature. It is not about turning Winnie the Pooh stories into honey projects. It is about acquiring a language that allows you to mediate between the child and the story; to draw attention to what is happening to whom and why; a language that holds the key to an ever-growing community of story.

Stories all fit together in a cosmic game of infinite proportions. The more stories readers possess, the more able they are to play the game. Stories are acquired one at a time, word upon word – words growing into stories. Ted Hughes explains, in very evocative terms, that words contain a whole “constellation, floating and shining” of “not just the crowded breadth of the world but all the depths and intensities of it too”.² As a single strand of DNA carries the code of a human being, as Blake sees the whole world in a grain of sand, so too a single word – Hughes chooses “crucifixion” – can bring “the inner brightness” of a whole cosmic story into consciousness. A single word lights up the breadth, depth, and intensity of the world.

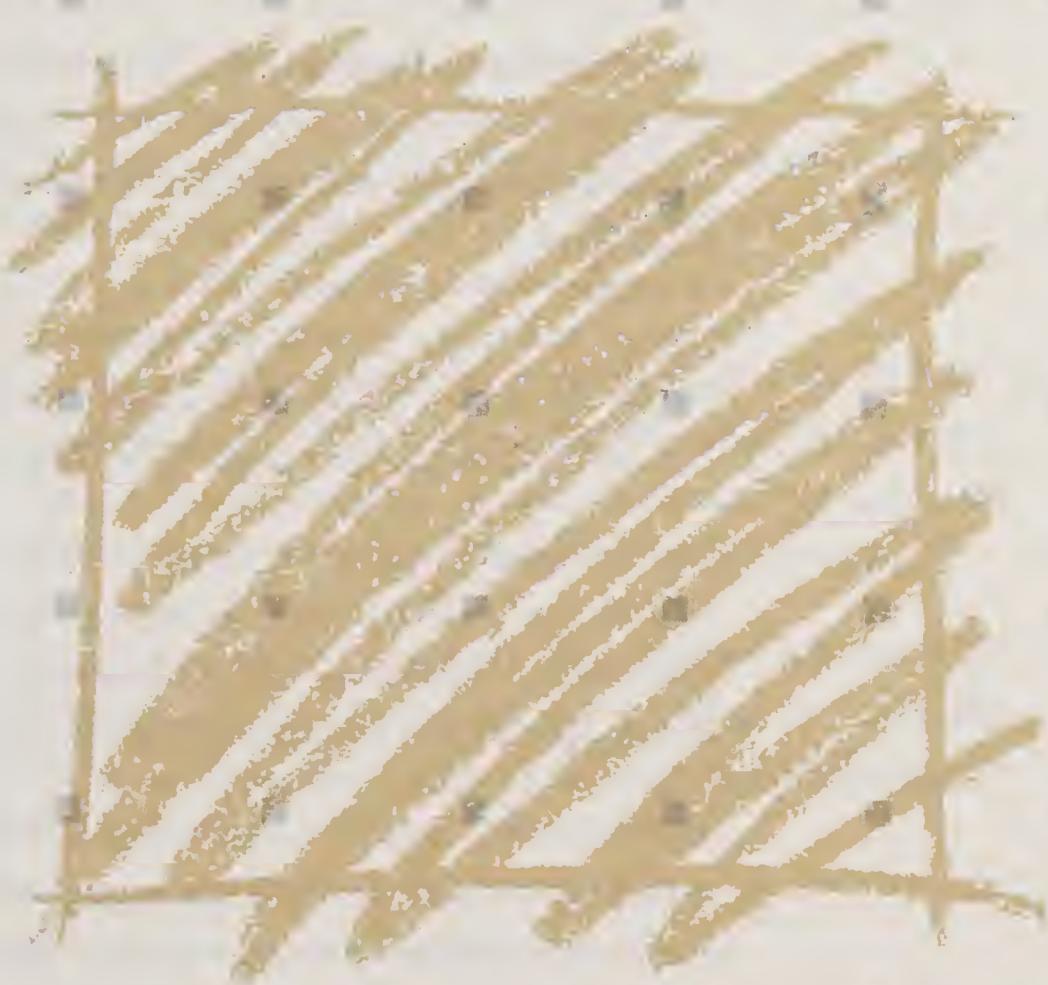
In the end, says Hughes, words and stories live within us; they “remain part of the head that lives our life, and they grow as we grow. A story can wield so much! And a word wields the story.”³

1. T. S. Eliot, “East Coker”, in *Four Quartets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), p. 27.

2. T. Hughes, “Myth & Education”, in *Writers, Critics and Children*, edited by Geoff Fox, Graham Hammond, Terry Jones, Frederic Smith (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1976), p. 81.

3. Ibid., p. 81.

Notes on Contributors



Notes on Contributors

Johan Lyall Aitken (“Myth, Legend, and Fairy Tale: ‘Serious Statements About Our Existence’ ”). All we have are stories; educating the imagination of all children through the development of narrative consciousness is, for Johan Aitken, the hope of the world. She is a professor at the Faculty of Education, University of Toronto, and at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

Beverley Allinson (“Cross-Age Tutoring in Writing”) works to bring books and children together, believing that good stories feed the imagination and the spirit. She writes with children, and for them, and is based in Toronto.

David Booth (“Our Own Words and the Words of Others”, Parts 1 and 2, and “ ‘Would You Rather . . . ’: Looking at Drama and Story”) cares about books and children and helping teachers find ways of making those relationships stronger. He is a professor at the Faculty of Education, University of Toronto.

Diane Dawber (“Poem As Car”) believes that children are self-propelled towards discovery and that poetry can help them in their quest. She is a Kingston area poet and a teacher with the Lennox and Addington Board of Education.

Kathy Lowinger (“Canadian Magazines in the Classroom”) believes that the books that feed children’s imaginations ought to be the very best we can offer. She is director of the Canadian Children’s Book Centre, Toronto.

Joan McGrath (“Canadian Novels in the Junior Classroom” and “Reading to Children”) wants to put the best possible books into children’s hands, classrooms, and homes. She is a library consultant for the Toronto Board of Education and a freelance book reviewer.

Barbara Park (“Teaching Beginning Reading With Children’s Books”) respects the thinking and language capabilities of children and believes it is our responsibility to nourish those capabilities with the richest possible resources. She is a professor at Duncan McArthur Hall, Queen’s University.

Lissa Paul (“Inside Poetry” and the prologues and epilogues) envisions a time when all children can share in the pleasure and power of imaginative literature. She teaches children’s literature at the University of New Brunswick.

Jo Phenix (“Our Own Words and the Words of Others”, Part 1) believes in giving all children access to literature so that every reader, regardless of ability, is introduced to good stories. She was formerly an English consultant with the Peel Board of Education.

Brenda Protheroe (“Six Magic Words”), a member of the City of York Board of Education, wants to help students find and learn to value their own voices through telling their own stories and responding to those of others.

Judy Sarick (“Finding the Right Book at the Right Time”) believes that reading is a most pleasurable form of entertainment. She is a children’s librarian who now earns her living as a bookseller.

Paul Shaw (“Storybook Reading and Literacy: Children’s Responses to Stories”) believes that teachers are the key to children’s attitudes to literature. He is principal of Floradale School, Mississauga.

Larry Swartz (“Our Own Words and the Words of Others”, Part 2) enjoys exploring the connections between books, himself, and other readers. He is a language arts resource teacher with the Peel Board of Education and an instructor at the Faculty of Education, University of Toronto.

Gordon Wells (“Stories Are for Understanding”) believes that there is a story in everything, and that all stories are worth telling. He is a professor in the Curriculum Department, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.



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Growing With Books

Book 1: Literature and Education

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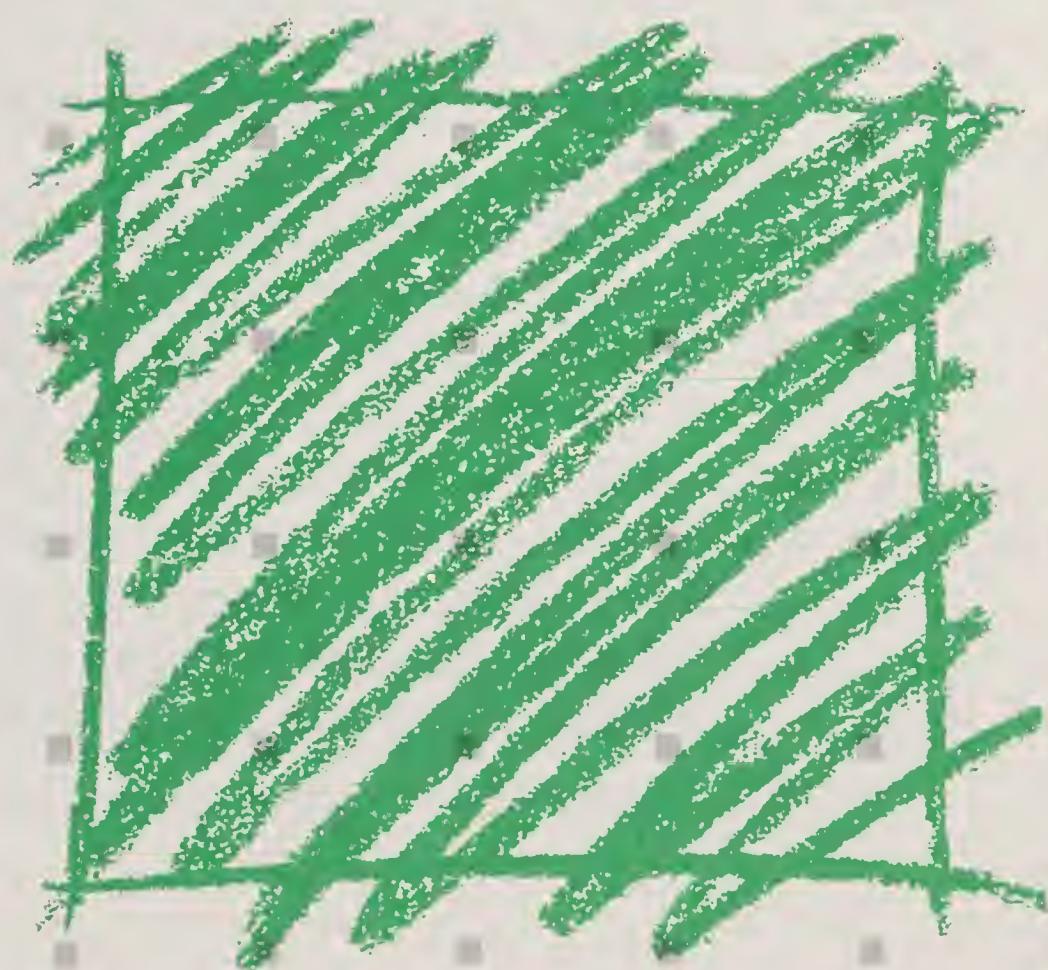


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Prologue:

What Stories Have to Do With Life





Prologue: What Stories Have to Do With Life

Lissa Paul

Relationships between literature, education, and life are always awkward to explore, but they are especially so now, when explicit information of questionable moral value is so easily available.

Children watch television programs containing scenes of sex and violence, but similar scenes in books are the cause of public outrage. Explicit classroom instructions on the dangers of strangers are sanctioned, yet similar literary accounts are condemned. So runs the scenario of our social schizophrenia: we believe in the need to warn children about potential social dangers, while we reject fictional accounts of such dangers as unsuitable for children.

Yet cultural truths presented in the context of stories, unlike those on the television news, are tempered by the mind and morality of the author. What we, as teachers, have to remember is that stories create a space where moral and social issues can be explored safely – without threat. And therein lies their value.

Both Gordon Wells and Johan Aitken understand very well where the truth of stories lies. Their articles are about the connections between literature and life and about how those connections can be made in the classroom.

In “Stories Are for Understanding” Gordon Wells demonstrates (especially in his transcripts of conversations between children), the two-way connection between literature and life. He shows how children develop the capacity to make stories lifelike – and to make life storylike.

In “Myth, Legend, and Fairy Tale: ‘Serious Statements About Our Existence’”, Johan Aitken explains the theoretical ground for the relationships between life and stories that are visible in Wells’s transcripts. Aitken looks thoughtfully and affectionately at how stories speak to the very heart of our humanity. Her easy grasp of Freudian, feminist, and

Marxist theories allows her to show how the injustices of society can be tempered through the “sustenance of imaginative art” and how archetypal stories provide the essence of our personal belief systems.

Wells and Aitken eloquently argue that stories are as essential to our humanity as breath itself. Stories, especially myths, legends, and fairy tales, are, in a way, as ephemeral as air, transmitted from the breath of one teller to the next. But stories are not as delicate as they seem.

As a case in point, a small group of Old English elegies, composed some time in the tenth century, comes to mind. They survived only by chance. Most Old English manuscripts – those that escaped being used to wrap up medieval garbage – were lost forever on October 23, 1731, in the fire that demolished the Cotton Library at Ashburnham House, Westminster, where the manuscripts were housed. Only about thirty thousand lines of Old English literature are extant today.

Several of the elegies tell of a lone minstrel’s friendless wanderings through the hostile landscape of Anglo-Saxon England. In the poems, the decaying vestiges of ancient Roman roads and buildings that haunt that landscape become metaphors for personal isolation.

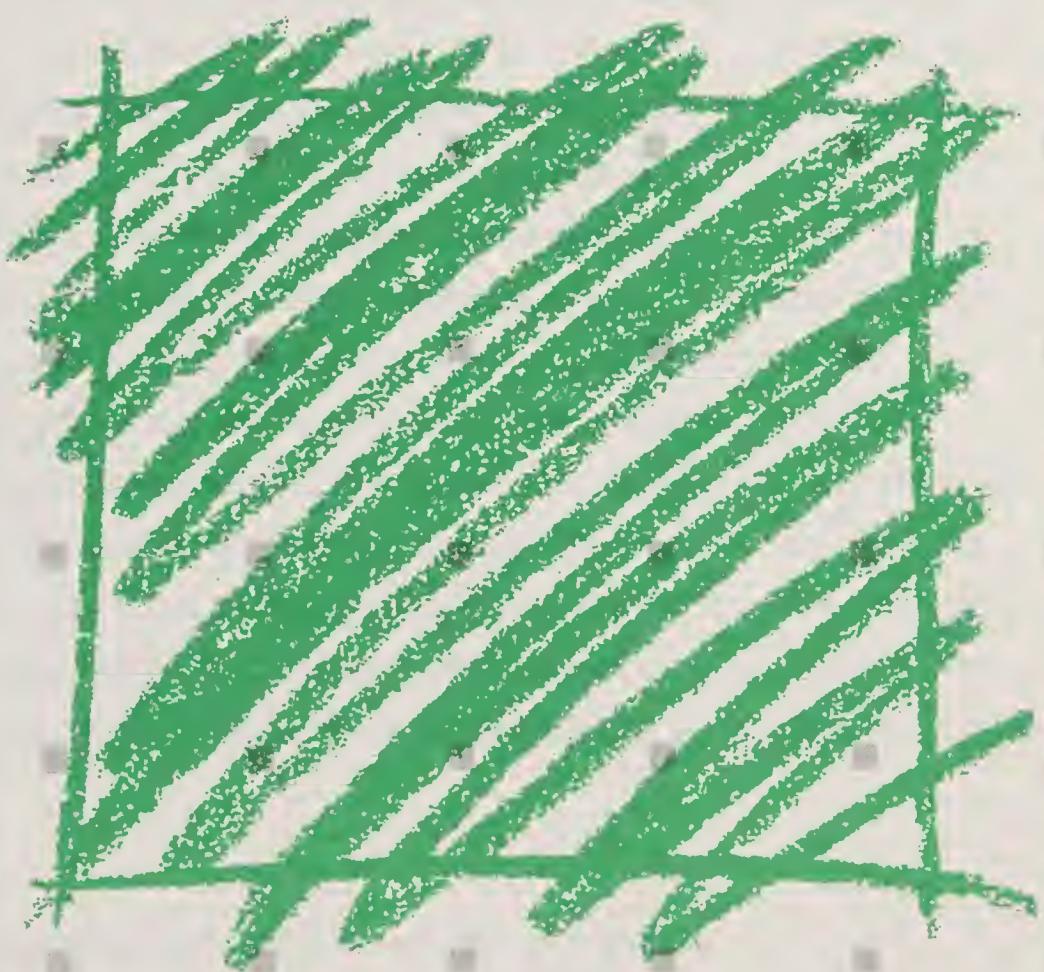
Still, within this desolation there is something very much alive, something conveyed in the language of the poems, something that still rings chillingly true – especially in “Deor”, where the wandering poet (whose name gives the poem its title) contemplates his own misery through a lens of other stories about decay.

Deor’s lament, “Thaes ofereode; thisses swa maeg” (That has passed over; so may this) records the transitory nature of his own existence, and that of the material world. A thousand years later, Deor’s lament still transmits the physical ache of his condition. The Roman ruins are still visible in the English countryside, a little more ruined than when Deor wandered through them. But the poet’s words are as alive at this



moment as when they were written. The poignancy of his story touches us as sharply now (even though we receive it indirectly, in print, often in translation) as it must have touched the audience who first heard that poem carried on the breath of its author. It is the emotion carried in the words, the humanity, that binds us to him. And that connection is not ephemeral.

Stories Are for Understanding





Stories Are for Understanding

Gordon Wells

Once upon a time, and a very good time it was, there was a moocow coming down along the road and this moocow that was coming down along the road met a nicens little boy named baby tuckoo ...

His father told him that story: his father looked at him through a glass: he had a hairy face.

He was baby tuckoo. The moocow came down the road where Betty Byrne lived: she sold lemon platt.¹

So begins James Joyce's account of the development of a writer of stories: with a child seeing himself in a story that is itself nested within a narrative reconstruction of early childhood. My own interest in stories started in a rather similar way – as a listener to and reader of stories. However, instead of becoming a writer of stories, I became a researcher trying to understand the significance of stories for the development of literacy. A very different concern – or so it seemed to me then.

The Development of Storying

The first clue in what in retrospect seems rather like a detective story was the finding of a positive association between ease in learning to read and write and the frequency with which the children I had been studying had stories read to them.² Following up this finding, I began to look more carefully at the recordings we had made of children at home, in order to see whether there were other ways in which stories played a part in their lives. And here Joyce's opening paragraphs offered a further clue.

By beginning his novel with a vignette of family life organized around a story, Joyce points (although not necessarily consciously) to the fundamental significance that stories have as organizers of the young child's experience. Without some organizing principle, the kaleidoscope

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1. James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (Harmondsworth, Mx.: Penguin, 1960), p. 7.
 2. G. C. Wells, "Pre-school Literacy Related Activities and Success in School", in *Literacy, Language and Learning*, ed. D. Olson et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

of people, objects, and events that succeed each other in a child's life must remain fragmentary, unconnected, and essentially meaningless. Like the thread that links a collection of separate stones and makes them into a necklace, a "story" links events together in a narrative sequence and gives them coherence and significance.

In the first year or two of life there is little overt evidence of this active "storying"³ – though that should not lead us to suppose that it is not taking place. Even before children have acquired the resources for conversation their experience is providing examples of some of the most basic narrative motifs: cause and effect seen in actions and their consequences; intentions formed and achieved or thwarted; hunger, pain, and separation experienced and then alleviated through the loving ministrations of others. As they make these connections between events children are establishing the basis for their own inner storying – that is to say the narrative schemas or frames they will use to make sense of their experience. Then, as they become able to comprehend the speech of others, they hear these same motifs expressed in the comments, questions, and explanations of others and have their own inner storying validated and extended.

As the child grows older, though, there begins to be more direct evidence of the interpretive and shaping power of story as, in conversation, he or she attempts to recount experiences to others. At first these accounts tend to be limited to events in which the listener was also involved and are often prompted by an adult – e.g., "Tell Daddy what we did today."⁴ Only later is the child able to tell about events in which the listener did not share, and this may require considerable adult assistance if the original impulse to link events in a narrative structure is to be carried to a successful conclusion. In the following example, Mark provides

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3. I use this term to mean the activity of constructing stories in the mind, whether in language or in some other mode of representation.
 4. M. A. K. Halliday, *Learning How to Mean* (London: Edward Arnold, 1975).

the series of (imaginary) events; but it is only with his mother's helpful interjections that he is able to construct the narrative sequence.

Mark (aged two years and one month) is looking out of the window. He had previously seen a man working in the garden opposite.

MARK: Where man gone?

Where man gone?

MOTHER: I don't know.

I expect he's gone inside because it's snowing.

MARK (*said at a higher pitch*): Where man gone?

MOTHER: In the house.

MARK: Uh?

MOTHER: In the house.

MARK: No.

No.

Gone to shop, Mummy.

(*The local shop is close to Mark's house.*)

MOTHER: Gone where?

MARK: Gone shop.

MOTHER: To the shop?

MARK: Yeh.

MOTHER: What's he going to buy?

MARK: Er – biscuits.

MOTHER: Biscuits, mm.

MARK: Uh?

MOTHER: Mm. What else?

MARK: Er – meat.

MOTHER: Mm.

MARK: Meat.

Er – sweeties.

Buy a big bag sweets.

MOTHER: Buy sweets?

MARK: Yeh.

M – er – man buy – the man buy sweets.

MOTHER: Will he?

MARK: Yeh.

Daddy buy sweets.

Daddy buy sweets.

MOTHER: Why?

MARK: Oh – er – shop.

Mark do buy some – sweet – sweeties.

Mark buy some – um – I did.

By the age of four or five most children are able to manage the narration by themselves, and some are able to tell quite long and involved stories, provided they have an interested audience.⁵ More often, however, we first see this ability emerging in their imaginative play, either alone or with other children.⁶

In the following example, Sam, John, and David are playing with a varied set of play people and animals. David has a cardboard box: this is his “base”. Sam also has his own territory: a wooden boat, on which he has a family of lions. All around is the sea – the playroom carpet. At this point in their play, John, who also has a boat and an assortment of play people, is torn between joining David on his base or Sam on his boat. The problem is that neither base nor boat has sufficient room for all of John’s people. As each child contributes from his own imaginary world, it is the jointly constructed narrative line that enables them to integrate those worlds in a collaborative manner and to manage the interpersonal conflicts that so often arise in the course of play. (*Note:* in the following dialogue, utterances in italics are spoken in “play” voices appropriate to the characters concerned.)

5. C. G. Wells, *The Meaning Makers* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1986), pp. 197-98.

6. See, for example, “Narrative Play in Second Language Learning”, in H. K. Chin and S. B. Heath, *The Language Play* (Norwood, N.J. : Ablex, 1986).

SAM (to John, to take his play people somewhere else): Now you have to live on your boat.

DAVID (to self): 'Tend it was put down like that (arranging his base).

JOHN (to Sam): Why? Why do we?

SAM: 'Cos there was no room for you (on his boat).

(David puts people, furniture, etc., into his base.)

JOHN: Pretend we was sending boats back (moves Sam's boat with the lions on).

SAM (speaking as lions): *No, that's our boat! That's our boat!*

JOHN: No, but pretend we was sav – saving them back so people could get, um – (to David, who has got in the way) That was your fault.

SAM: *Okay, we're living on here* (on the boat).

Oh, we'll die.

(John begins to put his people on David's base.)

DAVID: We – we've got all the luggage. *I'm going to sleep.* (Pretends to cry.) All our luggage is – is – One of, er – one of our boyfriends is crying in a corner (pretends to cry). Pretend one of the – the – their children was crying in a corner (pretends to cry).

SAM: Why was that?

DAVID: It was because they didn't like being on the – (pretends to cry).

SAM: They didn't like being on land.

DAVID: – all squashed up, did they?

SAM: No, they didn't like being –

DAVID: They went outside, didn't they?

SAM: Yes, and they had to go out. And it was poison on the sea and they had to die, didn't they?

JOHN: No, they didn't. They got on this boat (the lion's boat).

They jumped on to there. They was good jumpers.

Although the reader of this extract probably has some difficulty in following the thread, the children clearly had none. Even when their suggestions were in conflict, they listened to each other's contributions to

the jointly constructed story and modified their actions in ways that were mutually acceptable. One interesting feature of this particular example is the use of the past tense in those utterances that develop the narrative. It is as if the children know that, to be recounted, the actions must already have happened, and it is tempting to see in this the influence of the stories they have heard, for all three boys were frequently read to. The effects of this familiarity with stories are apparent in the range of roles they are able to take on and in the understanding they show of the thoughts and feelings of their imaginary characters.

The same is equally true of course as, a little later, children begin to learn to read and to start writing stories themselves. The quality of their experience as listeners to other people's stories and the richness of their own storying in dramatic play are a major influence on the ease with which they learn to make sense of print and on the quality of the stories they compose themselves. Those who have heard how written stories sound are quicker to recognize these characteristic uses of language when they meet them in the books they read and gain control over them more readily in their own writing. However, even without this advantage, every child has an ability to create stories, which will manifest itself, if only we provide encouragement and the conditions in which it can flourish.⁷

The Deeper Significance of Stories

So far, I have tried briefly to trace the development of storying through the Primary years and to show how stories provide a natural entry into literacy. But as I was working on this material I read an article by Richard Gregory, an eminent neuropsychologist, that extended my understanding of the significance of storying very considerably. A particularly intriguing aspect of the article is Gregory's emphasis on "brain fictions" as a

7. D. Graves, *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1982).

unifying concept for explaining the diversity of human mental activities.⁸ In perceiving objects in the world, for example, we interpret incoming sense data by constructing from past experience a framework, or fiction, in terms of which the data make sense. In research in the natural sciences, too, the interpretation of evidence depends crucially on theory, which, although more abstract and more general, is another form of fiction.

Put in slightly different terms, what Gregory seemed to be arguing was that storying was a much more central characteristic of the human response to experience than I had previously recognized. And, thinking along these lines, I recalled the distinction that James Britton had drawn between the two roles of participant and spectator in human affairs.⁹ In the participant role, he has argued, we are concerned to get things done, to achieve our purposes; in the spectator role, however, when we are temporarily removed from the arena of action, we reflect on what has happened, recasting events in the shape of a story in order to perceive and savour their significance. Britton's interest was in language and in the different functions it performs: as a form of action in the participant role and as an organizer of reflection in the role of spectator.¹⁰ Although, as Gregory has shown, the brain can construct fictions and use them to guide actions without recourse to language, it is clear that the availability of language immensely enhances the power of these fictions by enabling us to capture them for conscious consideration and reworking and to share these processes with others.

Could it indeed be that it is in storying that language makes its most basic contribution to thinking, by providing the symbols and structures from which our stories – narratives, interpretations, and theories – are constructed? This is certainly one way of understanding the significance

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8. R. Gregory, "Psychology: Towards a Science of Fiction", *New Society* (23 May, 1974), pp. 439-41.
 9. J. Britton, *Prospect and Retrospect* (London: Heinemann, 1982).
 10. "Writing and the Story World", in J. Britton, *Explorations in the Development of Writing* (Chichester, England: John Wiley, 1983).

that is attributed to language, for example, by the writers of the Bullock Report, as can be seen if we mentally substitute “story” for “symbol” in the following quotation:

Man’s individual, social and cultural achievements can be rightly understood only if we take into account that he is essentially a symbol-using animal. By this account what makes us typically human is the fact that we symbolize, or represent to ourselves, the objects, people and events that make up our environment, and do so cumulatively, thus creating an inner representation of the world as we have encountered it. The accumulated representation is on the one hand a storehouse of past experience and on the other a body of expectations regarding what may yet happen to us. In this way we construct for ourselves a past and a future, a retrospect and a prospect; all our significant actions are performed within this extended field or framework, and no conscious act, however trivial, is uninfluenced by it.¹¹

Seen from this perspective, storying is a basic form of mental activity – perhaps *the* distinctively human one – and one that is pre-eminently carried on through the medium of language. Furthermore, the products of this activity are clearly not limited to the stories that are read or told to us by other people. We each of us carry on a continuous “storying” in our own heads, as we attempt to relate events to a story framework in order to interpret them and use the same frameworks to plan ways of realizing our intentions in the future. “Making sense” of something is thus to a very great extent being able to make up a plausible story about it.

Reassessing the importance of stories in young children’s development from this present vantage point, we can now see that the stories that are told to children and acted out in the routines of their everyday lives support and enrich the threads of their inner storying to provide them with a framework of interpretation within which they fashion their understanding of the world and, through understanding, come to be able to control it. And from this it is a short step to the recognition

11. A. Bullock et al., *A Language for Life: Report of the Committee of Inquiry Appointed by the Secretary of State for Education and Science* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1975), p. 47.

that, for each of us, the reality we inhabit is to a very great extent a distillation of the stories that we have shared: not only the narratives that we have heard and told, read or had read to us, or seen enacted in drama or on television, but also the anecdotes, explanations, and conjectures that are drawn upon in everyday conversation in our perpetual attempts to understand who we are and where we're going.

Storying Across the Curriculum

With this enhanced understanding of the fundamental significance of storying I began to look at the place of stories in school and in education more generally. What I found was that, beyond the primary years, stories received little official recognition except in the literature class. School is for learning about the “real” world, and stories are perceived by most teachers as frivolous and pupils’ personal anecdotes as annoying and irrelevant interruptions of the official matter of the curriculum. Stories are all very well for preschoolers and for learning to read and write, the argument goes, but once the skills of literacy have been acquired the emphasis should shift to facts, to real-world knowledge and the subject disciplines in terms of which that knowledge is organized. Such a view, I now believe, is fundamentally mistaken, and in this final section I wish to challenge the main assumptions on which it is based and to argue instead for a recognition of the importance of stories right across the curriculum.

The first mistake is in assuming that the imaginative and affective response to experience is of less value than the practical and analytic or, indeed, in thinking that they are in competition with each other. A fully mature response is one that achieves a balance of the practical, the moral, and the aesthetic. To help students to achieve such a balance should be the concern of all teachers, whatever the curriculum content for which they are responsible. This is fast becoming apparent with

respect to science and technology: unless our students learn to respond to scientific knowledge in a balanced manner there is little hope that their world will remain worth inhabiting. But the same need for a balanced approach to knowledge applies equally in other subjects. In all areas of the curriculum, stories have a major role to play, in the form of biographies, historical novels, newspaper and magazine features, and so on, and, of course, in the stories that students bring in speech or writing from their own experience.

A second mistaken assumption concerns the simple opposition that is often drawn between “fact” and “fiction”: that the former is true while the latter is largely unreliable and irrelevant. Quite apart from the difficulty of drawing a clear distinction between the two, this assumption oversimplifies the complex manner in which fact and fiction are interrelated in all branches of knowledge. As Gregory has shown, in the article previously cited, the facts with which most subjects of the curriculum are concerned are facts only within the framework of some theory. Theories, then, share many of the imaginative, “as if” characteristics of fiction. Moreover, as theories change through radical reconceptualizations of a particular subject matter, the interpretation of the relevant facts alters too. On the other hand, the stories that are classed as fiction are rarely far removed from the “facts” of everyday experience: the characters have hopes and intentions, and their actions have consequences, just as in real life. To be believable the action must take place within a possible world that is governed by the same sort of consistent laws as we believe operate in the “real” world. In sum, the relationship between “fact” and “fiction” is much less straightforward than is often assumed to be the case.

In more humorous vein, Rosen makes a related and equally serious point when he claims:

If you aspire to becoming an invertebrate paleontologist you must be someone given to storytelling. What is geology but a vast story which geologists have been composing and revising

throughout the existence of their subject? Indeed what has the recent brouhaha about evolution been but two stories competing for the right to be the authorized version, the authentic story, a macro-narrative. There are stories wherever we turn. How do we understand foetal development except as a fundamental story in which sperm and ovum triumph at the dénouement of parturition? Every chemical reaction is a story compressed into the straitjacket of an equation. Every car speeds down the road by virtue of that well-known engineer's yarn called the Ottocycle.¹²

If theories are “macro-narratives”, similar in many respects to the stories that we class as fiction, what about the ways in which theories are constructed and knowledge is built up? Is that not too a form of storying – both in the successive contributions of different thinkers to an intellectual discipline (for example, the progression in physics from Galileo to Newton to Einstein) and in the development of the understanding of any particular thinker? And so we return to the point with which we started: the role of stories and storying in the development of each individual.

It is readily accepted that young children find it easier to assimilate new ideas when those ideas are presented within the framework of a story. Only gradually do children move from the particularized example to the principle. However, even older students find that illustrative anecdotes make general principles easier to grasp and, given the opportunity, they will frequently look for such anecdotal examples in their own experience as they talk through new ideas in the attempt to make the connection between “academic” knowledge and the “action” knowledge of everyday life. Rather than treat such storying as irrelevant, therefore, we should encourage it, recognizing that, as Rosen puts it:

- a) Inside every non-narrative kind of discourse there stalk the ghosts of narrative, and
- b) inside every narrative there stalk the ghosts of non-narrative discourse.¹³

12. “The Nurture of Narrative”, in Harold Rosen, *Stories and Meanings* (London: National Association for the Teaching of English, 1984), p. 16.

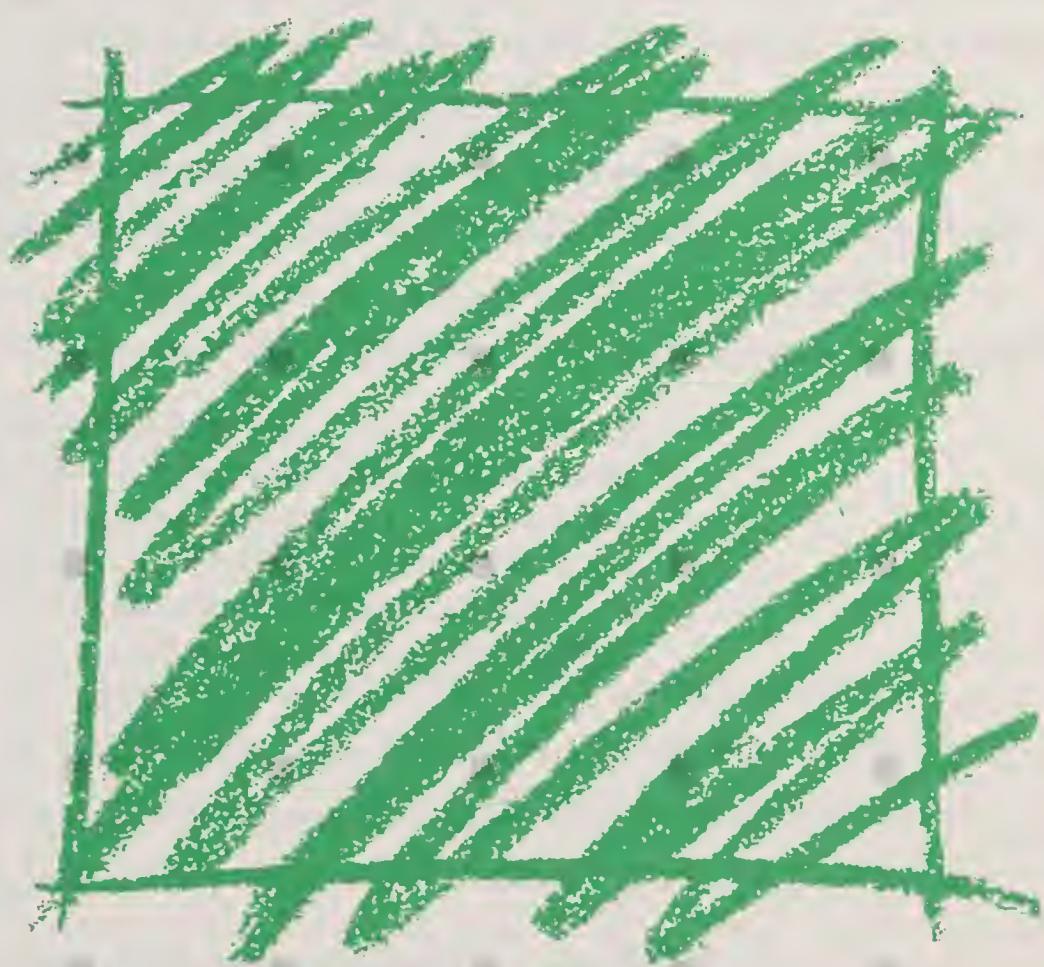
13. Ibid., p. 12.

Of course it is important that students should come to understand the difference between the two modes and be able to handle them both effectively. But the best route to the achievement of the more abstract and decontextualized formulation is likely, both developmentally and in the tackling of each new problem, to take them through the domain of stories, their own and other people's. Certainly this is the course I have followed in arriving at my present understanding.

If, as I have tried to show, storying is indeed the most fundamental way of grappling with new experience, we should be prepared to recognize the value of stories and encourage them at all stages of development. Right across the curriculum, storying provides a major route to understanding.

Myth, Legend, and Fairy Tale:

“Serious Statements About Our Existence”





Myth, Legend, and Fairy Tale: ‘‘Serious Statements About Our Existence’’¹

Johan Lyall Aitken

The Territory Defined

There was a boy who used to sit in the twilight and listen to his great-aunt’s stories.

She told him that if he could reach the place where the end of the rainbow stands he would find there a golden key.

“And what is the key for?” the boy would ask. “What is it the key of? What will it open?”

“That nobody knows,” his aunt would reply. “He has to find that out.”

“I suppose, being gold,” the boy once said, thoughtfully, “that I could get a good deal of money for it if I sold it.”

“Better never find it than sell it,” returned his aunt.

And then the boy went to bed and dreamed about the golden key.

Now all that his great-aunt told the boy about the golden key would have been nonsense, had it not been that their little house stood on the borders of Fairyland. For it is perfectly well known that out of Fairyland nobody can ever find where the rainbow stands. The creature takes such good care of its golden key, always flitting from place to place, lest anyone should find it! But in Fairyland it is quite different. Things that look real in this country look very thin indeed in Fairyland, while some of the things that here cannot stand still for a moment, will not move there. So it was not in the least absurd of the old lady to tell her nephew such things about the golden key.²

As Elizabeth Cook observes:

In rough and ready phrasing myths are about gods, legends are about heroes, and fairy tales are about woodcutters and princesses.... Critics take an endless interest in the finer differences between them, but the common reader is more struck by the ways in which they all look rather like each other, and indeed merge into one another.³

1. Isak Dinesen, in J. Yolen, *Touch Magic* (New York: Philomel, 1981), p. 18.

2. G. MacDonald, *The Golden Key* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967), pp. 1-3.

3. E. Cook, *The Ordinary and the Fabulous* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 1.

A glance at my bookshelf reveals the following titles: *Myths and Fairy Tales*, *Fairy Tales and Legends*, *Myths and Legends*, *Folk and Fairy Tales*, and *Legends and Folk Tales*. I know from my close association with the innards of these collections that little or no differentiation is made regarding the type of the tale. “Cinderella”, for example, is included without ceremony or comment in collections of myths, of legends, of fairy tales, and of folk tales, indicating that the proverbial common reader is not the only one who is “struck by the ways in which [these tales] look rather like each other”.

My emphasis will be upon tales “merging into one another”. Common denominators will be stressed. While there are many collectors, compilers, collaborators, revisionists, editors, and such involved in the literary and book production of these stories, the tales are all traditional in the sense that they either have no precise authorship much later than the time of Homer, or, as in the case of Andersen and Wilde, they follow a carefully circumscribed pattern and shape. These traditional tales cross the bridge from reality to fantasy in order to make what Isak Dinesen has called “serious statements about our existence”.⁴ They are about our deepest fears – our nightmares – and about our highest hopes – our dreams. Their genius “gets under our skin, hits us at a level deeper than our thoughts or even our passions, troubles oldest certainties till all questions are re-opened, and in general shocks us more fully awake than we are for most of our lives.”⁵

The Territory Under Siege

It may seem misguided pedagogy to look unflinchingly at the case against the genre I consider most fabulous and fertile and which I shall be advocating for use as either the foundation of the language arts or English program or the centre, depending upon how one prefers to

4. See footnote 1.

5. C. S. Lewis, in an introduction to *Phantastes and Lilith*, by George MacDonald (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Erdman, 1964), p. 10.



design curriculum. However, a contemporary apology for myth would be dishonest and ephemeral if it did not take into account the challenge of much current criticism to what Jane Yolen calls children's "birthright: the myths, fairy tales, fantasies and folklore that are their proper legacy".⁶ "Why," queries Ursula Le Guin, "are we so afraid of dragons?"⁷

While many teachers may agree that "myth, legend and fairy tale are the only basics worth getting back to",⁸ many do not. Even those who do cannot be unaware of or unaffected by the clanging and often convincing challenges to their use of this material in schools, libraries, and story-telling festivals. The charge is rarely, if ever, based exclusively upon aesthetic or literary criteria: it is usually based primarily upon analysis of content and a particular vision or interpretation of that content. There are many theorists – political, sexual, sociological, psychological, to name a few – who from their own perspectives have questioned the wisdom of sharing myth, legend, and fairy tale with children. They seem to have forgotten, temporarily at least, that "works of literature are not things to be contemplated but powers to be absorbed."⁹

Many political theorists demonstrate this kind of amnesia when, for example, they see myth and fairy tale as tools of subversion, and legend as a perpetuation of racial stereotyping. All the arts have been repeatedly assailed as harbingers of capitalist decadence, revolutionary fervour, bourgeois thought, fascist imperialism, and so on. Jack Zipes argues effectively in *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* that such was the case in Germany at the time of the rise of the Third Reich.¹⁰ The present-day Marxist charge of elitism in myth is also important to consider. There is an undeniable preponderance of royalty in fairy tales, and of gods in myth. As Robertson Davies ponders in his review of Bruno Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment*: "And what about all those kings and queens and princes and princesses? Where do they fit into the life of the child

6. J. Yolen, *Touch Magic*, p. 14.

7. U. Le Guin, *The Language of the Night* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1979), p. 39.

8. J. Aitken, "Making It New", *Indirections* (September 1983), p. 21.

9. N. Frye, "Expanding the Boundaries of Literature" (unpublished paper, 1984).

10. Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* (New York: Wildman Press, 1983).

who has been suckled on the chemical pap of fake republicanism and fake democracy?” There is stress upon ultimate harmony, although strangely enough, some of the tales are profoundly revolutionary. These are genuine concerns. Sexism is another of the charges that must be taken seriously.

For the unknown goddess

Lady, the unknown goddess,
we have prayed long enough only
to Yahweh the thunder god.

Now we should pray to you again
goddess of a thousand names and faces
Ceres Venus Demeter Isis
Inanna Queen of Heaven
or by whatever name
you would be known

you who sprang from the sea
who are present in the moisture of love
who live in the humming cells
of all life
who are rain
with its million soft fingers

and you who are earth
you with your beautiful ruined face
wrinkled by all
that your children have done to you

sunlike lady
crowned with the whirling planets.

Lady of peace, of good counsel,
of love, of wisdom

we invoke your name
which we no longer know

and pray to you
to restore our humanity
as we restore your divinity.¹¹

11. Elizabeth Brewster, “For the unknown goddess”, in *In Search of Eros* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1974), p. 51. Used by permission of Irwin Publishing Inc.

Feminist theorists have pointed to what many consider a rigid portrayal of sex and age roles in myth, legend, and fairy tale. One cannot help but share the frustration of Liv, a mother in middle life, a travel agent, and someone who, as her professor husband says, “does all the business in our house, everything down to having the cars serviced”, when she angrily retorts, “I don’t care about Venus or Mars or Vulcan! What about Mars’ wife?”¹² That certain tales rendered in versions dictated by a patriarchal society reinforce the already dominant refrain in education of “see Dick run, see Jane sit” is undeniable. Jennifer Waelti-Walters claims that:

fairy tales teach girls to accept at least a partial loss of identity, and thus endanger all the relationships in which they must take part in a lifetime. These relationships are further jeopardized by the fact that the same tales transmit to boys an overt possessor/object, master/slave relationship pattern, the playing out of which will reinforce the self-destructive, victim pattern of behaviour taught to girls.¹³

When examining Simone de Beauvoir’s *Les Belles Images*, Waelti-Walters sees the protagonist Laurence, whose role has been that of subservient female, as achieving:

an integrated self and a sense of her own worth. She will not be tormented by the loss of “femininity” that comes with age. Her sense of self is no longer dependent upon her market value as a decorative object gracing her husband’s collection. Reflecting nobody, she need fear no rival in her mirror. The queen who will not kill is not dead.¹⁴

It is generally rewarding to identify fairy-tale patterns throughout literature, and what Waelti-Walters detects in *Les Belles Images* is the reflection of a common fairy-tale motif.

12. R. Wiebe, *My Lovely Enemy* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1963), p. 33.

13. J. Waelti-Walters, *Fairy Tales and the Female Imagination* (Montreal: Eden Press, 1982), pp. 7-8.

14. Ibid., p. 44.

Psychological interpretations of myth, legend, and fairy tale provide a curious mixture of opinion and well-developed theory, of ideology run rampant and thoughtful, well-supported analysis. Sometimes when a theorist is intimate with psychological insights but has only a nodding acquaintance with literature the results can be bizarre: not only words, it seems, but stories as well can mean anything we want them to mean. In Tom Lehrer's satiric couplet:

I can tell you things about Peter Pan
And the Wizard of Oz – there's a dirty old man.¹⁵

Freudian, neo-Freudian, and Jungian theories of “Little Red Riding Hood” can make a mere mortal feel that she has been either terribly retarded or frightfully repressed, or both, to have missed all that was going on right under (or somewhere under) her very nose! Much of this theory, however, must be taken to heart as well as head, for it speaks to us of the nourishing, healing, and sustaining aspects of myth, legend, and fairy tale, and will not be denied. As that most influential crusader for traditional lore, Bruno Bettelheim, advises:

The deep inner conflicts originating in our primitive drives and our violent emotions are all denied in much of modern children's literature, and so the child is not helped in coping with them....

The fairy tale, by contrast, takes these existential anxieties and dilemmas very seriously and addresses itself directly to them: the need to be loved and the fear that one is thought worthless; the love of life, and the fear of death. Further, the fairy tale offers solutions in ways that the child can grasp on his level of understanding.¹⁶

Many Jungian and many humanistically inclined Freudian scholars advocate teaching myth, legend, and fairy tale, and we have need of their illuminations in our own reflection and study. These scholars become part

15. T. Lehrer, *That Was the Year That Was*, LP Record, Reprise 6179.

16. B. Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment* (New York: Random House, 1977), p. 10.

of the siege upon the territory only when they cease, in Tolkien's words, to read myth, legend, and fairy tale as "tales" and insist upon studying them as "curios".¹⁷

One feature common to all detractors and dislocators of myth, legend, and fairy tale is their obvious conviction as to the power of these traditional tales. If they wish to banish them from education, as Plato did the poets from his Republic, they are acknowledging, as he did, that literature is pretty potent stuff. The second feature of those who would lay siege to the territory or subvert it to their own narrow purposes is a profound confusion, not generally experienced by children, between the imaginative worlds created by myth, legend, and fairy tale and the rather more mundane and limited "real" world in which, for most of our lives, we must move and have our being.

The Territory Defended

Elizabeth Cook sagely concludes that:

the fixed point of a myth or a fairy tale lies in its own concrete nature; not in any of the things that it suggests to different readers, and not in its conjectural origins.¹⁸

Then, reminiscent of Lévi-Strauss, she adds: "A myth is everything that it has been and everything that it may become."¹⁹

I shall now proceed to a defence of the turf Jane Yolen has identified as rightfully belonging to children – and to all humankind who, as T. S. Eliot several times reminds us, "cannot bear very much reality".

There are many serious schools of criticism which are purposefully and productively, like tigers at the gate, forcing the scholar/teacher to re-examine myth, legend, and fairy tale for use in school. For purposes of

17. J. R. R. Tolkien, "Children and Fairy Stories", in *Only Connect*, ed. S. Egoff (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 111.

18. E. Cook, *The Ordinary and the Fabulous*, p. 3.

19. Ibid., p. 3.

symmetry and brevity and also because they are among the most penetrating and influential, I shall deal with the three already mentioned: Marxist, feminist, and Freudian. The three schools also combine and conjoin in many instances, but I shall leave the reader to consider them in concert. It is quite difficult enough to respond to them individually.

A little girl, kneeling and painting on a large canvas spread out on the floor – in a position only a four-year-old can assume with grace and comfort – splashing about great gobs of blue paint and chatting to her neighbour, comments: “I used to be really scared of my dad, like, you know, he was a king or something.”

The language of fairy tale is helping this child describe the already-deposed monarch of her *ménage*. Parents and, alas, sometimes teachers, in their apparent omnipotence, are the queens and kings of early childhood. Myth, legend, and fairy tale give us assurance that we will grow up, that we will get out from under, that our turn will come.

Even when children and adults make every effort to live in a collective of equals, the adults simply are, for a time, physically larger and significantly more worldly wise. Without seeking any dirty dominance or sickly submission, they are perceived by children as queens and kings of their castles, however puny and poverty-ridden those structures may be.

That there is a great deal of social mobility in tales one must admit. There is a good deal of movement from rags to riches as reward for goodness, courage, or cunning. The implications are certainly there in many traditional tales that satins and fine houses are more desirable than draughty thatched-roofed cottages and oatmeal once a day. The same “message”, more cruelly and crassly presented, is everywhere in our society without the balance of justice and the sustenance of imaginative art. The symbolism is rarely lost upon children who care, above all, for the yarn. To be a queen or a king is to be in control of one’s life – something all children both yearn for... and dread. Any adult attempting to

use any course or content in the service of any ideology is no longer providing genuine education. Genuine education raises questions: it never provides pat answers. The intention of the teacher is all-important. If the intention is to tell a tale of magic upon which the starving imagination can feed and thrive, well and good. There is, as Stanley Fish observes, never any single text in any class.²⁰ This (Marxist) critic is helpful, however, in warning of the potential danger when any content is deliberately subverted for ideological purposes.

The feminist charge of sharply drawn and rigidly defined sex roles in myth, legend, and fairy tale cannot be dealt with until a number of points have been conceded. “He is to purvey and she is to smile,” as Jane Austen said, is what the message-hunter may find. But there are other ways of interpreting tales than as paradigms for sexual modelling.

We are all a combination of Penelope and Ulysses in varying proportions and at various times of the year and of our lives. In the spring, for example, “thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages” – we yearn for the open road; perhaps, like Molly Bloom, for a new companion each spring – but as Chaucer knew, any excuse will do when the fit is on. Very few of the group in his tales have as their sole motive “the hooly blisful martir for to seke”.

In the winter some of us, Ulysses-like, head for the hills, since the Aegean is not handy, but many of us feel with Eliot that while spring disturbs, winter protects, and the Penelope in us who loves hearth and home predominates. A quick survey of one’s acquaintances will reveal many female Ulysseans and many male Penelopeans. And why not? All the evidence is not in, at any rate, as far as sex-role identification in response to story is concerned and we may be permitted some healthy scepticism.

That myth, legend, and fairy tale have been twisted to suit the purposes of patriarchy is no doubt accurate enough, but these tales have no

20. Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980).

monopoly on this tendency in the school curriculum. Revisionist criticism is necessary but vision is also helpful. We may not applaud theft, murder, and generally taking the initiative (Gretel does all three in a tale in which her older brother spends most of his time in a cage) but they can scarcely be called passive tactics. While Zeus can triumph over Hera, she manages to make life difficult in return, and many other goddesses enjoy pushing gods – to say nothing of mere mortals – all over the place.

Betty Booker of “Betty Booker’s Bridle” is definitely in charge of everything, from Skipper Perkins on. Ruth leaves her own country and people to go away with her mother-in-law to a new land. It is her choice, and it works out well. Search as I might, I have never found Mr. Pig, and Ms. Pig has been bringing up those three little ones and sending them off to seek their fortunes since the tale began.

Bettelheim, who stands accused by Marxists, feminists, and fellow Freudians, is still going strong. One of his most “useful” observations is that myth, legend, and fairy tale provide the child with a “rich and variegated fantasy life . . . which can help prevent his imagination from getting stuck within the narrow confines of a few anxious or wish-fulfilling day-dreams circling around a few narrow preoccupations”.²¹ Bettelheim himself is not in favour of providing children with the framework some psychoanalytic theory has unearthed in the tales. One can only hope that teachers agree with him on this point and are not going to foist adult self-consciousness upon children any earlier than it will come of its own accord. Cook’s observations on the subject are worth quoting:

A reader who takes his eyes off the story that is in front of him, and looks for something else behind it, will eventually see nothing but the theories he would have held whether he had read the story or not. To a reader who is attending to stories as they are, and above all to a child hearing them for the first time, Hades “means” anything and everything he knows that can be described by the words dark, cold, misty, formless”.²²

21. B. Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*, p. 119.

22. E. Cook, *The Ordinary and the Fabulous*, p. 4.

The many variations of the tales and the changes, to and fro, from sad endings to happy ones and from just deserts to abundant mercy, attest to roles adult anxieties have always played in controlling and shaping what children hear and read.

In one era, for example, the gingerbread man is eaten up; in another, he becomes a gingerbread boy and is of the lineage of Isaac and Pinocchio – the child of aged people, who long for progeny. In this version, the gingerbread boy does not get eaten up. He has a narrow escape and runs home to the little old man and right into the waiting arms of the little old woman. We get two very different creation stories in Genesis, and the genealogy of gods and goddesses on Olympus is often impossible to disentangle. I refer not only to shafts of sunlight, swans and such, but also to conflicting versions of who, for example, sired Persephone.

In “The Three Bears” the old woman/witch – the interloper who eats food and sleeps on beds that belong to others and is duly punished – gives way to Goldilocks, a naturally inquisitive, amoral little girl who somehow turns the story around and makes the bears villains in their own house because they don’t much approve of her antics.

The stories of Arthur are so varied that in some he has a slight footing in history and in others has his feet firmly planted not only at the head of the Round Table but squarely in the middle of story. The Trickster of Indian legend not only has “logically” incompatible guises and adventures, he also, according to researchers, may have originally hailed from different locales.

As George MacDonald reminded us, all this would have been nonsense if it were not taking place in an imaginary spot on “the borders of Fairyland”. These infinite adaptations, coupled with the fact that myth, legend, and fairy tale can sustain and survive them, indicate the amazing fertility of the tales themselves and their virtually indestructible shape.

An Explorer’s Guide

In *Touch Magic*, Jane Yolen declares that “an understanding of, a grounding in, a familiarity with the old lores and wisdoms of the so-called dead worlds is . . . a basic developmental need”.²³ Yolen is an excellent guide for a tour of the territory of enchantment. After following in her footsteps through *Touch Magic* we can never return to the isolated and insulated Grade 9 course in mythology. It was too little, too late. It had high hopes, but unless the students had had much previous exposure to the genre at home or in libraries it was almost doomed to failure.

Now we find that Northrop Frye’s comment on the King James Version of the Bible – “[it] should be taught so early and so thoroughly that it sinks straight to the bottom of the mind, where everything that comes along later can settle on it”²⁴ – is no less appropriate to myth, legend, and fairy tale.

Myth, legend, and fairy tale can, as Yolen emphasizes, provide first of all a “landscape of allusion”. This is perhaps the crudest of the apologies for myth, legend, and fairy tale as basics in our contemporary curriculum, but an essential one nonetheless.

It is simply impossible to read current literature or decipher popular advertising without intimate familiarity with the dialect of the tribe, and this dialect, of course, is based upon our ancient tales. Who was the mighty Hercules before his dislocated form flashed upon our television screens? Who were Mary and Martha, and why have contemporary feminists found them such apt examples of certain kinds of roles imposed upon womankind? Why is the beloved disciple a possible entry for homosexuals in their need to find identity in the holy writ of Western culture? Doubting Thomases and irresistible Helens surround us, and we desperately need names for them if we are to understand them and their impotence or power.

23. J. Yolen, *Touch Magic*, p. 15.

24. N. Frye, *The Educated Imagination* (Toronto: CBC Publications, 1963), p. 46.

Since the English or language arts program eventually expands to include the total verbal experience of the student, it is not only for the purposes of understanding poets from Blake to Ted Hughes or novelists from Dickens to Timothy Findley that students need familiarity with literary code.

Sylvia Fraser's novel *The Candy Factory* includes a scene in which a secretary called Eve throws her apple core in the nearest waste basket; Judith Finlayson, writing about feminism in the *Globe and Mail*, needs Pandora's box to make her point; Linus Pauling (of Vitamin C fame) writing in the daily paper in his more recent capacity as a scientist for peace refers not only to Armageddon, but is himself referred to as a Cassandra. When Indian actor Will Sampson criticized what he considered an inaccurate telefilm about his people, the reviewer in *Maclean's* could not resist the caption, "Sampson takes on the Philistines".

In the past year I have encouraged several classes to bring me clippings from popular magazines and newspapers and have found that they delight in turning up with articles that allude to Pharaoh, Pilate, and Adonis. They find quite illuminating the exploits of Apollo, the sensual influence of Aphrodite, and the lure of Calypso in the many diverse popular publications read by their families and friends. It is perhaps a chastening and deflating lesson to learn that one's own generation has not invented sex and that love as well as lust existed outside wedlock before our present teenagers were dreamed of. Lancelot and Guinevere are surely helpful here. The generation gap, so-called, may be lessened, and the decrease in ignorance and arrogance that often ensues can be nothing but salutary.

What Yolen has called the landscape of allusion is of course as essential for visual art and music education as it is for literature. Alas, with our emphasis on skill and performance, many a competent Grade 9 flutist has never heard of Pan and many a sweet-voiced school choir singer

knows not whereof she sings when she sings of Tristan and Isolde. Similarly, the student adept with oils and at the kiln may have no idea of the nymphs, satyrs, madonnas, and demons that his skill has the power to invoke. Understanding the landscape of allusion also helps young people gain familiarity with the shape of stories. Literature is made out of other literature or, as Yolen puts it, “stories lean on stories, art on art”, and the form of the tale is as important to literature as the form of the sonata or fugue is to music.

Yolen sees the second function of myth, legend, and fairy tale as providing a way of “looking at another culture from the inside out”.²⁵ In other words, we do not only go back to our cultural roots by connecting with our tales, we also become “familiar with the pantheon of Greek gods, who toy with human lives as carelessly as children at play”.²⁶ This brings the Greek world view into focus. “If a child learns about the range of Norse godlings who wait for heroic companions to feast with them at Valhalla, then the Vikings’ emphasis on battle derring-do makes more sense”.²⁷ The group of stories that hang together to form a mythology makes it clear that anyone stuck within the confines of his own time and space cannot possibly see or experience even it. As Joseph Campbell points out, humans have always had “a long backward reach”.²⁸

Studying the mythologies of Greece and the Bible helps us to see the perverted myths of contemporary advertising and to have some power over them. Getting away from it all and beating our path to what is probably a less and less rustic cottage in the north is not hard to see as a contemporary distortion of the golden longing within the human breast ever-and-always to get back to the garden and to recapture that lost paradise. In a witty article in the *Atlantic Monthly*, Garrison Keillor indicates several new ways of interpreting old tales, and they shed great light

25. J. Yolen, *Touch Magic*, p. 16.

26. Ibid., p. 16.

27. Ibid., p. 16.

28. Ibid., p. 17.

upon modern advertising. (Last names are omitted to protect the identity of the characters.) Snow explains:

In trying to come to terms with myself, I've had to come to terms with my stepmother and her envy of my beauty, which made our relationship so destructive. She was a victim of the male attitude that prizes youth over maturity when it comes to women. Men can't dominate the mature woman, so they equate youth with beauty. In fact, she was beautiful, but the mirror (which, of course, reflected that male attitude) presented her with a poor self-image and turned her against me.²⁹

When people are terrified by age and the loss of a narrow and specific form of sexuality, myth and fairy tale can help in various ways. First, as in this retelling of the Snow White story, we see that the beautiful maiden and the old crone have always been with us – and as archetypes, not stereotypes. Even without the help of Robert Graves, however difficult he is to resist in this context, we can see that the ancient tales are full to the brim with insight concerning where real beauty resides. Several valuable new anthologies of stories where females have more important attributes than physical allurement and do not sit mooning that “some day my prince will come” are now available.³⁰ These tales are drawn from all cultures and are all retrieved from bygone times: they have simply been told, written, loved long since, and lost awhile. Their recovery reveals again the discrepancy between appearance and reality. These old tales rediscovered and shared are helping immensely to quench an ageless thirst. Tatterhood, for example, a young woman of action riding on goats, or sailing ships herself, has what the social scientists today would call, I suppose, “a relationship of mutuality”. Told as the good yarn it is, the ideas are incarnate and we can dispense with the jargon. This is how

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29. G. Keillor, “My Stepmother Myself”, *The Atlantic Monthly*, March 1982, pp. 77-79. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.
 30. Such anthologies include E. Phelps, *The Maid of the North* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981); A. Lurie, *Clever Gretchen and Other Forgotten Folktales* (New York: T. Y. Crowell, 1980); and T. MacCarty, *The Skull in the Snow and Other Folktales* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1981).

the tale concludes, and a happy ending it is indeed:

At last Tatterhood said, “Aren’t you going to ask me why I wear these ragged clothes?”

“No”, said the prince. “It’s clear you wear them because you choose to, and when you want to change them, you will.”

At that, Tatterhood’s ragged cloak disappeared, and she was clad in a velvet green mantle and kirtle.

But the prince just smiled and said, “The colour becomes you very well.”

When the castle loomed up ahead, Tatterhood said to him, “And will you not ask to see my face beneath the streaks of soot?”

“That, too, shall be as you choose.”

As they rode through the castle gates, Tatterhood touched the rowan wand to her face, and the soot streaks disappeared. And whether her face now was lovely or plain we shall never know, because it didn’t matter in the least to the prince’s brother or to Tatterhood.

But this I can tell you: the feast at the castle was a merry one, with the games, and the singing, and the dancing lasting for many days.³¹

Yolen, having remarked upon the “landscape of allusion” and the knowledge of ancestral cultures provided by making myth, legend, and fairy tale new in every age, proceeds undaunted to the more touchy, more controversial, less strictly rational, and, some would argue, most important functions of myth and tale. The first of these more elusive and complex functions is “myth conceived of as a symbolic form... a way of organizing the human response to reality”.³² Myth in its simplest terms is story, and the shape of the myth helps us to narrate our own lives and the lives of our tribe, people, country, or planet. Narrative consciousness – an awareness that we are always putting experience in story form – comes to us in a direct line from mythology. We not only endow human experiences with shape, significance, causality, and direction, we use the symbolic language of myth to narrate our stories. Religions, nations, institutions, clubs, families, friends, lovers, and virtually all manner of

31. E. Phelps, ed., *Tatterhood and Other Tales* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1978), p. 6.

32. J. Yolen, *Touch Magic*, p. 17.

human groupings have their symbols and talismans to help them organize responses to the welter of impressions, images, and stimuli which assault us and with which we grapple daily. Our craving for meaning would go largely unsatisfied without the shapes and symbols provided by mythology.

The fourth function of myth, legend, and fairy tale which Yolen identifies is more closely linked to language in general and metaphor in particular. She says that “the great archetypal stories provide a framework or model for an individual’s belief system”. She stresses the importance of the symbolic, metaphoric language, which is then “honed by centuries of tongue-polishing to a crystalline perfection”.³³ The symbolic language is something that a young child seems to understand almost viscerally; metaphoric speech is the child’s own speech. We may know that indeed our sun neither rises nor sets, yet sunrise and sunset are so much part of our human metaphorical system that, oddly enough, television earnestly informs us in print and sound at precisely what time these events which do not occur can be expected to take place. Even in our greatest scepticism and cynicism we seem determined to keep trying to turn our strange environment into a home:

True myth will always serve as an inexhaustible source of intellectual speculation, religious joy, ethical inquiry, and artistic renewal. The real mystery is not destroyed by reason. The fake one is. You look at it and it vanishes. You look at the Blond Hero – really look – and he turns into a gerbil. But you look at Apollo, and he looks back at you The poet Rilke looked at a statue of Apollo and Apollo spoke to him. “You must change your life,” he said.

When the genuine myth rises into consciousness, that is always its message. You must change your life.³⁴

This fourth function remains a risky one and perhaps the one most amenable to distortion. Nevertheless, our exploration would therefore be incomplete without it.

33. Ibid., p. 18.

34. U. Le Guin, *The Language of the Night*, p. 77.

After painting a terrifying picture of children and, by implication, of the race itself deprived of mythology, art, and language and therefore unable to generalize or interpret experience, Yolen concludes with a more encouraging statement:

A child conversant with the old tales accepts them with an ease born of familiarity, fitting them into his own scheme of things, endowing them with new meaning. That old fossil, those old bones, walk again, and sing and dance and speak with a new tongue.³⁵

Some Suggestions for Using Enchantment

The pros and cons of picture book and film

The problems inherent in using innocent-looking and often exquisitely beautiful picture books may not be immediately apparent. Since these books appeal to us we are not likely to exercise caution in their use. Nevertheless, the picture book can be prescriptive as well as descriptive, and the child's first encounter with any myth, legend, or fairy tale is better told by the carefully rehearsed teacher with an occasional assist from a professional story-teller or simply read with respect from unadorned print. Thus no lid or limit is put on the imagination during this initial encounter. When the child sees picture books, it is wise to present at least two illustrations of the same tale.

I often suggest “blowing” the book budget for primary and junior grades on a dozen picture books of the same tale. Possessing at least two different visual interpretations safeguards the child's own initial imaginations. If there is only one pictorial version available, and it held in the hand of that all-knowing teacher, it must be “right” and my glorious pictures-in-my-head must be “wrong”. If there are two renderings to view, then why not three? Why not mine as well? Why not, indeed?

35. J. Yolen, *Touch Magic*, p. 20.

With all our writing about, and wrestling with, reader-response theory, we have been sluggish in examining the response to the visual impact of the illustrated tale. Do our first impressions simply get stuck in our imaginations? Hearing – not seeing – is surely the ideal way to enter the tale unencumbered and free to see and feel what is there.

Film, of course, has no responsibility to be “true to the story”. It is free to create something else instead. But what filmmakers do buy when they buy rights, as McLuhan pointed out, is the title.

Now most titles of myth, legend, and fairy tale are free for the asking, but I would, all things being equal, just as soon let a child form her or his own images of Moses before being assaulted by the extravaganza of *The Ten Commandments*. Even with a perceptive celluloid version such as, for example, *The Loon’s Necklace*, I would prefer the experience of print to precede that of picture and, if at all possible, the human voice reaching human ears to come first of all.

The racist tale reconsidered

Perhaps because of our own mental sets, or even because of authorial intention, racism may appear in legend or folk tale. Rather than stripping books from the shelf or providing an index of tales to avoid, consider telling or reading the tale to a small group or the whole class and discussing the aspects that concern you. Nowhere is the skill of the teacher more important than when it comes to seeing a tale both in its own time, which may be a long time ago and far away indeed, and in our own time as well. Sometimes a legend with racist undertones or overtones may help us understand, and thus outgrow, an unexamined prejudice.

Expanding the boundaries of legends

One area of study that has become popular in Ontario schools is that of the legend and lore of Native peoples. Research is being conducted and collections are being feverishly compiled. Sometimes secondary school

students believe that “legend” is synonymous with “Native people’s legends”, and it is important both in the interest of the stories of Native people and for our students’ own perception that Native literature be seen as very special to us, but also as part of the body of legends-at-large.

It is of course a fulfilling activity to use the legends of the “heritage” countries represented in any classroom. And a final plea for the Arthurian tales. While *The Boys’ King Arthur* is an unfortunate title, the tales themselves make jolly good reading and are necessary for what Yolen calls the “landscape of allusion” as well as what John Hirsch, Jr., refers to as “cultural literacy”.

Sexism laid bare – and low

Sexism in myth, legend, and fairy tale has been dealt with at length, but a final reminder is perhaps in order. There are many collections of ancient lore rediscovered in which strong females prevail and prosper; several were suggested earlier. If there is a balance to redress, these books are an immense help and have an authentic ring that is not to be found in much of the recently revised material.

In case the dire warnings of the danger to female self-esteem inherent in myths, legends, and fairy tales have any validity, it may be as well in the meantime to strike a balance between tales portraying strong female characters and those portraying strong males. It should be remembered, however, that there is infinitely more that is sexist in life than in art for present-day children and if one is alert to danger, it is wise to be sure where it is to be found.

Activities: glimpses into the obvious

I resist providing a list of activities that can be used in conjunction with the telling and reading of myth, legend, and fairy tale, but the strong and suggestive visual qualities of these stories combined with an easily identifiable and powerful story line make them naturals for drama, visual art, and music, or a combination of the three. For the “researchers” in the

class of Intermediate or Senior students, the tracing of a mythological character through the arts of the ages and into contemporary times is a splendid idea. If it “takes”, I have found that students will work much harder and longer on such a project than I should ever have presumed to suggest. Writing from a minor character’s point of view, updating the tale, writing scripts for performance, writing or taping in pairs, with partners taking opposite points of view – these are just a few of the possible ways of actively engaging children in reading and writing about myth, legend, and fairy tale.

Making connections

Children detect the connections between tales even without adult intervention. When a similarity is cited, discoveries seem to erupt everywhere and it is the wise teacher who encourages making connections without being outlandishly far-fetched.

It is interesting to note that, of all the arts, myth and fairy tale most easily bridge distances – between East and West and between old and young. The territory can never really be defined or defended. It is the home of the imagination where, for a few precious moments, we escape the confines of space and the tyranny of time. Providing young people with keys to what C. S. Lewis calls “other worlds” is no mean accomplishment.

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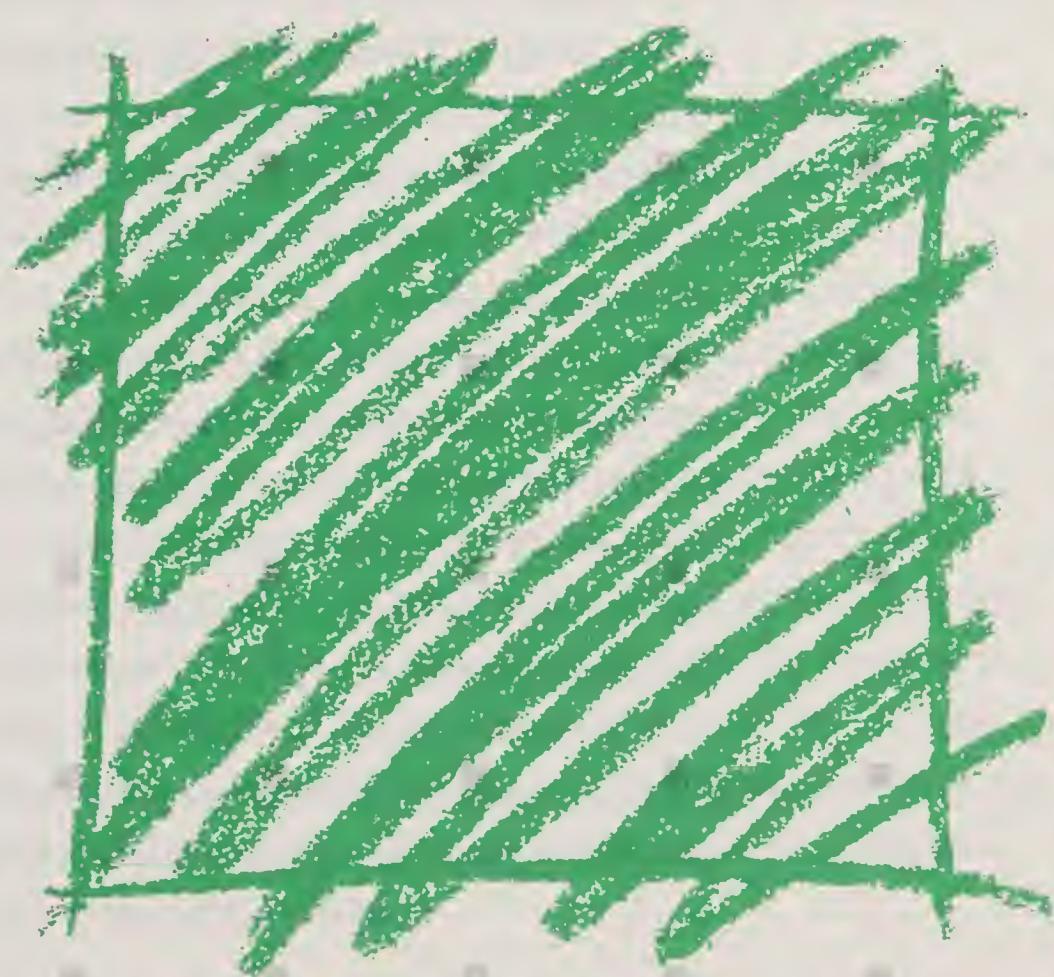
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Epilogue:

Life and Literature in the Classroom





Epilogue: Life and Literature in the Classroom

Lissa Paul

“It is all very well to identify connections between literature and life,” you say, “but what does it have to do with stories in the classroom?” A great deal.

Stories enable us to find order and value in the incoherence of everyday events. The capacity to see the play of figure and ground (as in those silhouettes that are either two faces in profile, or a goblet, depending on how you look at them) can be developed. We can encourage children to establish links between literature (especially traditional literature) and everyday experience; and to make connections between pictures and words. Here are some ways to make those connections in the classroom.

Children flicker between the everyday landscape and the imaginary, between the stories they hear and those they create. Stories that stay with people tend to be about the real social and economic concerns of growing up, concerns about love and money, and about life and death.

The interesting parts of a story, the ones that make us think, are often the parts we really don’t understand, or that give us conflicting messages. So when we look for gaps in the story, incomplete descriptions, or places where the pictures are in conversation with the words, we are actively engaged in determining the meaning of the text.

In *Rosie’s Walk*, for instance, we can encourage children to explore, perhaps through role playing, the relationship between the threat of the fox and the obliviousness of the hen. Or we can talk about how the pictures and the words tell different stories – with the words playing straight-man to the slapstick comedy routine of the pictures; or about how Rosie and the fox resemble the cartoon characters Roadrunner and Coyote. This kind of reading makes visible both the connections between literature and life, and between pictures and words.

For older children, a comparison between the three illustrated versions of *Rapunzel* (for example, one by Felix Hoffman, first published in German in 1949;¹ one told and illustrated by Jutta Ash in 1982;² and one

1. J. Grimm and W. Grimm, *Rapunzel*, illustrated by Felix Hoffman (London: Oxford University Press, 1960).

2. J. Grimm and W. Grimm, *Rapunzel*, illustrated by Jutta Ash (London: Andersen, 1982).

told by Barbara Rogasky and illustrated by Trina Schart Hyman in 1982)³ offers a more complex, more disturbing study of the relationships between words and pictures, and between literature and life. As with most fairy tales, the story itself is straightforward, and quite short. But the ethical issues it presents raise complex human questions about desire, theft, deceit, responsibility, punishment, justice, cruelty, and redemption.

Something very strange happens from version to version. The play of good and evil in the story depends very much on how the characters and setting are conveyed. Hoffman's version is the most conventional and traditional. He tells a story about thick, stolid-looking peasants who, because they desire food, are wrongly robbed of their child by an ugly giant of a witch. The witch is shown running off with the screaming baby Rapunzel tucked under her arm like so much lettuce. In the end, Rapunzel lives to establish her own family, and the witch is punished by an avenging bird who cuts her down to size (the size of "a shrivelled apple") and makes baby-bird food out of her.

Jutta Ash and Barbara Rogasky tell stories that are probably quite close to acknowledgement of the psychological truths of fairy tales and they make these truths tangible. Both treat the tale as a story about redemption – about growing up, being separated from one's mother and going out into the world. The witch in the 1982 versions subverts the stereotype of unjustly robbed parents and wicked witch. In fact, the witch almost seems to rescue Rapunzel – from a teenage mother who is not old enough to look after a baby. In the Rogasky/Hyman version, Rapunzel's mother is a child-like figure, so small that she has to stand on a stool to look out the window to see the rampion she wants so much. The witch, on the other hand, looks like a wise woman. What is most apparent in the comparison of the three versions of Rapunzel is that it is quite difficult to tell the story without imposing a positive or negative charge on the characters and events.

3. J. Grimm and W. Grimm, *Rapunzel*, retold by Barbara Rogasky and illustrated by Trina Schart Hyman (New York: Holiday House, 1982).

When sharing books with children, look consciously and carefully at the words and pictures to determine the kind of story that is being told. Consider the landscape, for example: is it barren or lush? Does that alter the reader's response? Are Rapunzel's parents to be pitied for losing their child because of a minor theft? Or are they stupid and greedy? Does the witch really rescue Rapunzel and free the parents from the responsibility of looking after a child whom they are clearly too immature to look after? Is the witch a benign old grandmother? Or is she selfish and wicked? Should the witch be pitied for her desire to lock Rapunzel away from the world? Or should she be chastized? Does Rapunzel deceive the witch innocently or deliberately? Is Rapunzel a princess? Or a peasant? And what about the ending? Does the loss and blinding of the prince and the birth of Rapunzel's illegitimate babies constitute punishment for her crime of deceiving the witch? Or is she now redeemed and entitled to happiness? What does Rapunzel's hair have to do with all this? And what about the tower?

One way of opening up the story is to find the issues that intrigue you and your class – keeping your very particular set of social, cultural, religious, and ethical values always in mind. There are no easy answers. But the more carefully you listen to your students and the more attentive you are to where their interests lie, the better able you will be to enter a dialogue with them, to mediate between them and the story, and to connect stories with the human values of everyday life.

Children are not innocent. They share grown-up concerns, including the difficult ones of selfishness, choice, sacrifice, duty, and morality.

Even the very young children Gordon Wells describes in one of his transcripts are caught in the moment-to-moment working out of a life-and-death "Noah's Ark" scenario. These are not morbidly aberrant children. They know that the issue is survival.

A quick look at some of the most memorable moments in children's literature shows that stories about life and death are considered to be eminently suitable for children. *Little Women* is a story of little girls playing at mothers and funerals. *Charlotte's Web* is the story of the threatened death of a pig and the actual death of a spider. *Anne of Green Gables* is about love and death in the life of a lovable orphan. And the animal stories of Ernest Thompson Seton usually end with the (often violent) death of the protagonist.

To make connections in class between imaginative literature and the fundamental concerns of life, begin by finding a story that touches you. Then think about what makes it so powerful for you, what point in the story catches and holds your attention.

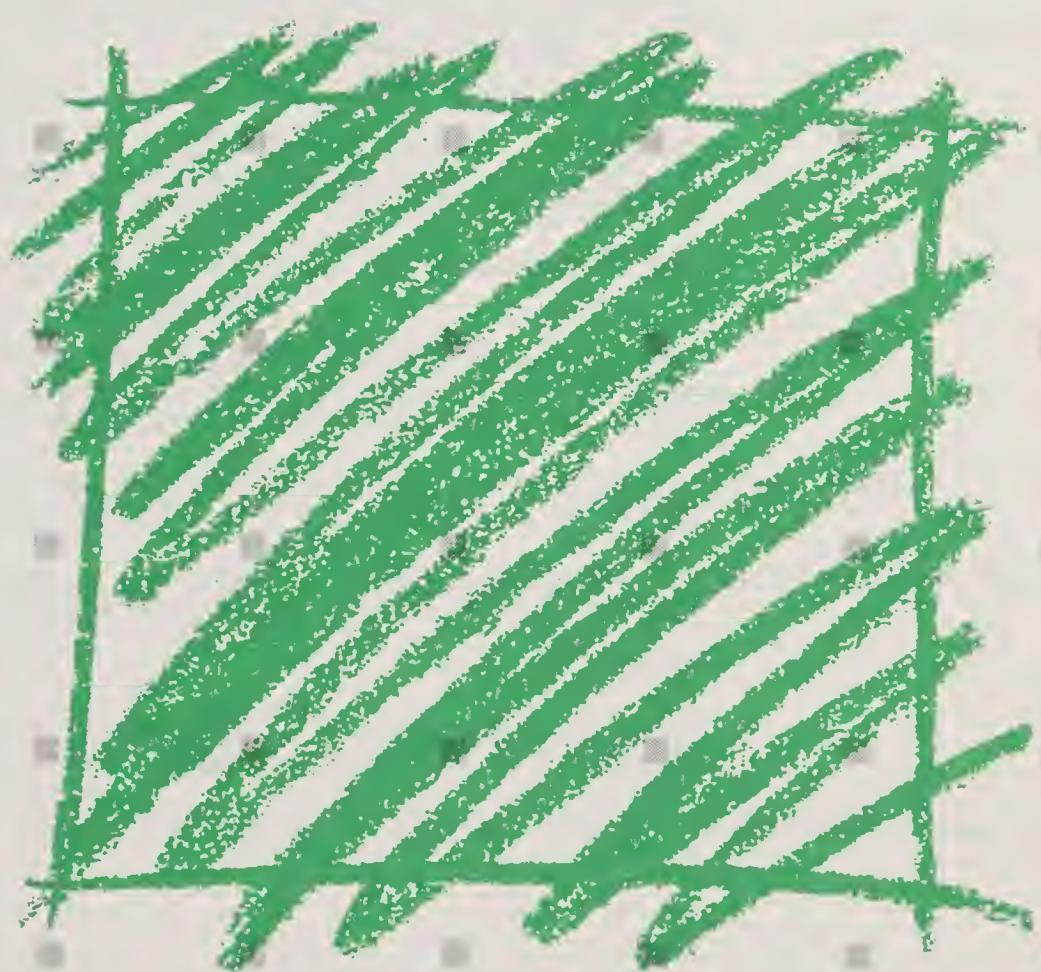
Try to match your own interests to those of the children in your class. Are they interested in contemporary fairy tales? Stories about super(wo)man heroes? Jack-the-Giant-Killer tricksters? Stories about knights-in-armour? If there are West Indian children in your class, you might tell some Ananse stories. Chinese children? Try some Chinese folk tales. Irish children? Irish fairy tales. But don't be too rigid about choosing tales to match cultural backgrounds of the children in your class. Sometimes a completely foreign or exotic culture is more attractive than a familiar one.

You might have students bring in a version of a familiar tale as told to them by someone from the "old country" (any "old" country will do). You might have them compare the same story – say "Cinderella" or "Little Red Riding Hood" – in contemporary and traditional versions. Or you might compare several different illustrated versions of one story, so

that the children can see how one story conjures up different pictures for different people. Or, like Johan Aitken, you might have students bring in references to myths, legends, or folk tales that appear in newspapers, advertising copy, magazines, and the like. In the end, these are only suggestions.

Read stories. That is the only important thing. And when you find one you like, share it with your class.

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Growing With Books

Book 2: Who Is Children's Literature For?

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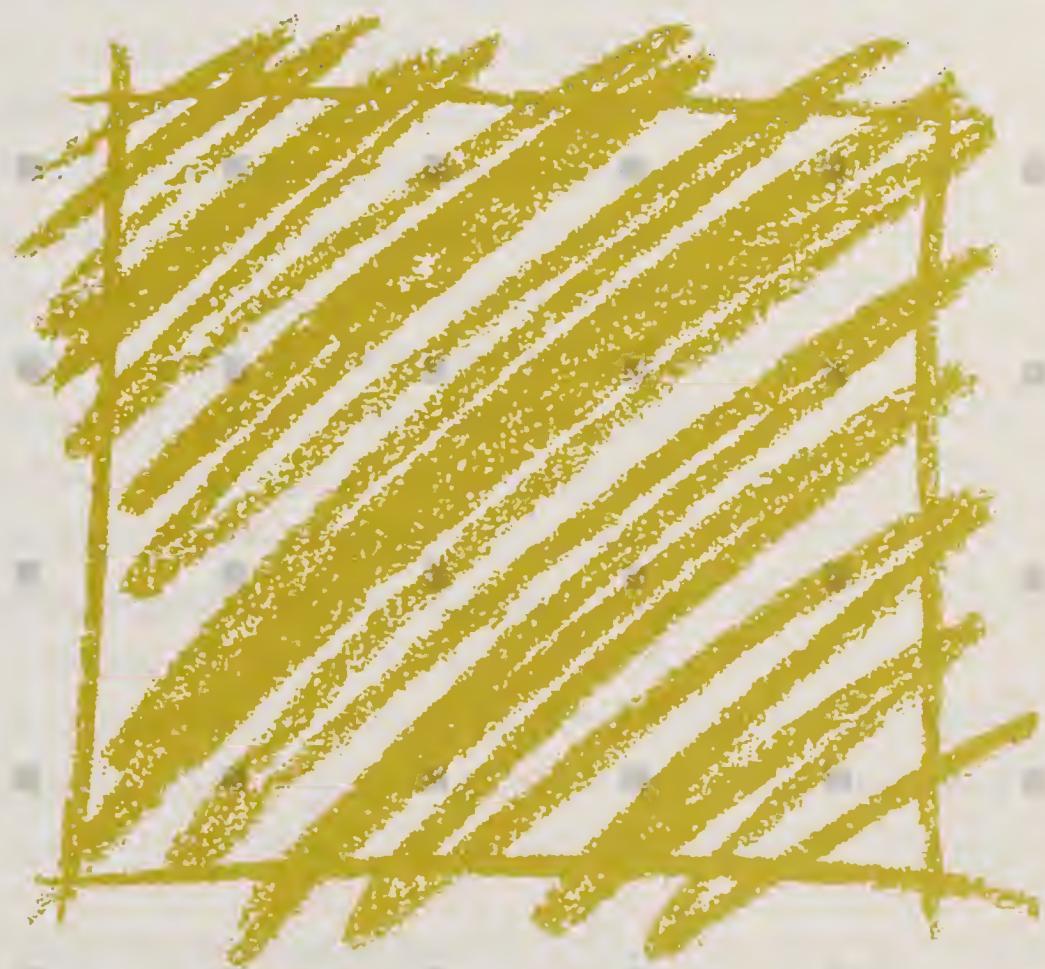
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Prologue:

Children's Literature Is Not Just

for Children – It's for Grown-ups, Too





Prologue: Children's Literature Is Not Just for Children – It's for Grown-ups, Too

Lissa Paul

Over the years, educational institutions have acquired the habit of slotting stories into age-defined or grade-defined categories. Some books, we say, are suitable for beginning readers, others for ten-year-olds or for young adults. The categories are familiar. But stories do not have to be read like that. As C. S. Lewis says: “No book is really worth reading at the age of ten which is not equally (and often far more) worth reading at the age of fifty.”¹

The articles in this section treat stories as more than just ways of defining reading levels of children. Stories are composed out of the love, attention, and work that authors put into making them. As teachers, we can make new readers conscious of the care that goes into thinking about a story and into writing it. Knowledge of the respect with which authors treat their work and knowledge of the conventions, structures, and techniques of stories can help turn new readers into seasoned readers – and into writers.

The reciprocal relationship between reading and writing is the subject of David Booth’s two-part article, “Our Own Words and the Words of Others” (the second part is in Book 5). In the body of the first part teacher Jo Phenix describes how the children she deals with every day learn to read stories by writing, and vice versa. The children find patterns in stories, then make stories that use the patterns. The advice in *The Formative Years* to “experiment with words, word patterns, and idioms”² is used in a vital rather than a static way. The clear beauty of one cumulative story is so arresting that a little is quoted here: “One thundering Thursday morning, while on my way to school, I saw four shivering geese flying away, three wet puddles freezing, two yellow leaves falling,

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1. C.S. Lewis, “The Reader and All Kinds of Stories”, in *The Cool Web: The Pattern of Children's Reading*, ed. Margaret Meek, Aidan Warlaw, and Griselda Barton (London: Bodley Head, 1977), p. 77.
 2. Ministry of Education, Ontario, *The Formative Years* (Toronto: Ministry of Education, Ontario, 1975), p. 10.

one cold squirrel gathering nuts near the little path through the woods.” (The rest of the poem is on pages 15 to 16, in the Booth/Phenix article.)

Beverley Allinson and Brenda Protheroe write about setting stories free from age-defined and grade-defined straitjackets. Both women write personal accounts of their in-class experiences with helping older children share stories with younger ones. Their articles radiate the success of their projects and demonstrate what taking stories seriously means.

Beverley Allinson, a writer with access to a Grade 7/8 class, had the students read stories with Kindergarten-Grade 1 children, then write stories for them. The two classes operated on a buddy system, with each older child taking responsibility for a younger one. Both groups thrived. The older ones learned what kinds of stories caught and kept the attention of their charges; this gave them first-hand knowledge of such important narrative conventions of literature as, for example, the art of selection. The efforts of the older children were rewarded by the improved literacy of their young partners. In treating reading and writing as something important, as something of tangible value, both older and younger children developed their skills and pleasure in reading.

Brenda Protheroe begins her article with an image of her hulking male Grade 13 students hunched over the class copy of *The Iron Man* by Ted Hughes; they were intent on finishing the story before the end of term. She had started to read the story aloud in class, but did not have time to finish it before the end of term. Her account testifies to the power of *The Iron Man* as a story for adults and children alike, and to her own sensitivity and ability to engage her students. Like the Grade 7/8 children, Protheroe’s Grade 13 students studied a unit on children’s literature. The students both read to and wrote for younger children. The value of the interaction was immediately apparent. Protheroe’s students learned first hand how to make stories and feel the pride of creation; and the little ones loved the attention of having stories written just for them.



Grade 13 students are adults for all intents and purposes. The children's literature unit reminded them about the importance of stories in their own lives. They also caught a glimpse of the role stories had to play for the upcoming generation of readers.

What comes through dramatically in all three articles is how stories transcend age, ability, and culture. Stories are for everyone.

Our Own Words and the Words Of Others

Part 1





Our Own Words and the Words Of Others, Part 1

David Booth and Jo Phenix

Working to expand children's lives through literature is a delicate task. The teacher must recognize the current needs and interests of the young people and at the same time encourage and persuade them to read and listen to selections that may lead them to new and significant understandings. Some of this material may at first appear remote or even alien to the students' lives. The children must constantly go back and forth between the story and their own responses, attempting to understand the experiences in the narrative in terms of their own lives. This "negotiation" of meaning between the world of the child and the world of the book forms the basis of reading. The potential power of children's literature to alter perceptions, widen horizons, challenge biases, and develop sensitive and compassionate individuals is very exciting to us, as teachers.

Helping children to see beyond themselves in order to achieve a better understanding of their own lives means setting up situations where their own words and ideas have worth, so that they have the security and the competence to explore new literary territory, to express their thoughts and feelings about their discoveries, and, if we are lucky, to adapt, absorb, and reflect upon the new learning.

The children must make the poems, the stories, the articles, and the pictures their own by responding to the content of the selection from their own experience, by using the underlying linguistic pattern as a beginning point for their own writing and by adopting special words for their own use. They will grow to appreciate literature and language as they develop an aesthetic awareness from using every aspect of the story or the poem in their own lives. This feeling of ownership towards literature is the key to building truly literate people. As the children blend the authors' ideas, words, and patterns with their own thoughts and language, they take possession of the material and can use it to explore and communicate their new personal meanings.

Ontario Grade 1 teacher Jo Phenix has experimented creatively with the use of children's literature in the daily programs of children in

school. In the following interview she talks about some of the techniques she used to help children become a part of what they read, hear, and view, and offers several fine strategies for incorporating literature into the curriculum.

Our Own Words

David Booth: Literature in the Primary Division. How do you have the children begin creating their own literature?

Jo Phenix: Right at the beginning it's just a one-word label, and then a sentence on each page. For example, in Colleen's book on Hallowe'en, each page has a single picture: "pumpkin", "ghost", "bat", "witch".

Janet uses the same kind of repeated pattern:

I like hearts on all kinds of things. I like hearts on swing sets. I like them on cars. I like hearts on pictures. I like hearts on clowns. I like hearts on games.

This one is a bit more complex – Angie's "I Was Walking at the Forest".

I was walking at the forest, I saw the sun. He said hello, and my friend said, "Hello, Mr. Sun," and the sun said hello back to us. I was walking at the forest. I saw trees. They said hello to me. I was happy. I said, "Did you say something?" They said, "Yes." Then I woke up with my sister. We went to the forest, I saw flowers. The flowers said hello to me, I said hello back to them. One day I woke up. I went to the forest. I went by myself. Then my friend came. I went to the forest. The sky said hello to me. I said hello back to him!

David Booth: I hear in the writing of the children all kinds of literary and linguistic structures that have come from the literature they have read and heard. Is reading a big part of your classroom?

Jo Phenix: It is. Quite a lot of the group writing that's done is part of the literature. The children read and internalize the pattern and then use the pattern in their own writing.

David Booth: How do you stop this from being simply restructuring at a simple level?

Jo Phenix: By doing brainstorming about different ideas, different settings, different concepts for the pattern, by collecting words and ideas, and then by working as a group to develop new ideas around the same pattern.

David Booth: And how do these groups share their stories when they are completed?

Jo Phenix: They share them, first of all, by publishing them, working together as a group to organize the story and illustrate it and do the publishing, and then we have a story circle where the groups take turns to read aloud their stories.

This next one came from a poem called “Over There”. This is part of the original:

Over the rice fields, over the kites, over the top of the northern lights. Over the ice fields, over the snow, right to the ends of the earth we'll go.¹

With this one the children worked in small groups, so the pattern books were written by a group of four children working together, and they chose the bottom of the ocean:

Over the rocks, under the fish, beside a whale, through the sea-weeds, near the starfish, around an octopus, on top of the sand, across a submarine, past some shells, on top of the seal, beside an otter, at the end of a shark, right to the bottom of the ocean we'll go.

1. Cynthia Mitchell, “Over There”, in *Fly Away Home*, ed. Jack Booth (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada, 1984), p. 77.

And the next group chose over the rainbow:

Under the sun, on top of a house, through the clouds, under the clouds, behind some, across the jet, over a fence, around the children, in the pond, on the driveway, past all the bright colours, near a pot of gold, right to the end of the rainbow we'll go.

David Booth: The sensory awareness in “Over the Rainbow” is lovely. I noticed, for example, that the phrase “in the pond” suggests the reflection of the rainbow in the water. The children also seem to have the underlying rhythmical structure in every line that they use on every page. So the pattern is the same but the concept is different.

Jo Phenix: Right.

David Booth: How important are the visuals the children have created?

Jo Phenix: It's important. It's interesting that when they do their individual stories, some of the children illustrate before they write, some of them illustrate after they write.

David Booth: And how about when a group plans?

Jo Phenix: Again, it works both ways. Sometimes the words come first, sometimes the pictures come first. If it's a pattern that they are using, usually the words come first. If it's an idea, very often the pictures will come first.

David Booth: How do you handle such things as the spelling?

Jo Phenix: The children use inventive spelling as they write, so they get their ideas down on paper. Most of the children right from the start put letters down on paper, and for the ones that couldn't write enough letters for the work to be readable, I would transcribe when they read the story to me.

David Booth: Is the writing in the group books your printing?

Jo Phenix: Sometimes it is, sometimes not. I try to have the finished product coming out as well as possible, so when the children can't do it, I do it for them.

David Booth: I notice that their word choice is definitely not single, monosyllabic “basal reader” style.

Jo Phenix: It isn’t. It’s their own language, or it’s the language from the literature.

David Booth: Do you have an example of the beginning stages where their “child talk” narrative is simply encoded and written down?

Jo Phenix: This one, “I Was Playing”, by Angie:

I was playing outside in the snow with my brother. I went outside to play with my brother, then we went back inside and it was still snowing. Then we put back our snowpants and we got down in the snow and we made a snowman. I did it with my brother.

David Booth: But even that has a definite beginning, middle, and end, doesn’t it? She has a sense of narrative.

Jo Phenix: Yes. I have one here by Shannon, the champion of the longest story. She even called it “The Story That Never Ends”, because in conferences we talked about this structure.

One day I was reading a book and it was nearly supper time. My mom called me for supper. After my supper my mom said, “Go and get into your PJs and then come downstairs and read your book and then go to bed.” I picked flowers while my mom was getting the breakfast for my dad and my brother, and my mom and I picked the flowers for Ryan and my dad and mom. And then I gave the flowers to them. They were my brother and my dad and my mom. And then my brother and me and my dad watched TV and my mom was getting the lunch ready. Then my mom called us for lunch and then we went shopping and then we came back and then my dad and me and my brother and my mom was getting supper ready and she called us for supper and she told us to get our PJs on and go to bed.

And it goes on for several more days like that.

David Booth: When they are reading aloud their own stories and their group stories, do they read with meaning and read by chunking the words into groups?

Jo Phenix: They do. When they read their own stories, that's the only way they can read. They read them back the way they wrote them.

David Booth: What connection do you see from reading their own stories to reading stories written by authors?

Jo Phenix: I think they learn to read for meaning by reading their own stories, because they are used to putting meaning in these stories. They expect to find meaning in a story; they expect it to make sense.

David Booth: When do you see the transition happening from reading our own writing to reading the words of others?

Jo Phenix: I think they go side by side. I don't know whether there'd be a stage of moving from one to the other. The two seem to grow together constantly.

David Booth: Then all the time you are reading aloud and helping them build up that deposit of literary and linguistic structures?

Jo Phenix: Right. From stories that they hear, you then hear the patterns and the ideas used in their writing.

David Booth: Let's take a look at some of the patterns that emerge in their writing. Do you have a counting book?

Jo Phenix: This is a counting one, a pattern from one that the children heard, "Cinnamon Bun".² Their own ideas for the counting rhyme were put down on chart paper and they used this as reading material for their chanting.

2. "One, One, Cinnamon Bun", in C. Watson, *Catch Me, Kiss Me, Say It Again* (New York: Philomel, 1978).

David Booth: The oral came before the writing then?

Jo Phenix: Right. And then the children did the illustrations for the story and it was published in a book, “One, One, Elephants Come”.

One, one, elephants come, two, two, kangaroo, three, three,
honeybee, four, four, lions roar, five, five, sea lions dive, six,
six, baby chicks, seven, seven, a bear called Kevin, eight, eight,
monkeys wait, nine, nine, porcupine, ten, ten, start again.

David Booth: Where do they get those wonderful rhyming words?

Jo Phenix: It was brainstorming: “Just what can we find that rhymes with each word?”

David Booth: On the theme of animals?

Jo Phenix: There was a lot of discussion on themes, several themes were tried, but some things didn’t work because they just couldn’t find the right words.

David Booth: How much of the children is in the layout of the lines, for example, the numbers in black, and the rhyming words in red?

Jo Phenix: That’s my idea to make it easy for them to read. When I did the original chart I did it this way, because with chart paper it’s easier to read if alternate lines are different colours. Also it’s easy to do a choral response that way because you can take either the red ones or the black ones.

David Booth: So the graphic input that you have in all of your books is equally important in the reading aspect as well?

Jo Phenix: Yes, it is. For example, how much goes on a page and the size of the print.

David Booth: That's the care artists take in putting out children's books and why it's equally important, when children write their own work, that they be able to read it easily.

Jo Phenix: This is a pattern from "A as in Apple Pie".³ And this again was done by a group of children. The original brainstorming was done as a group and the children then chose pages to illustrate.

A as in airplane, B built it, C cleaned it, D dusted it, E entered it,
F flew it, G gassed it up, H heard it take off, I iced up the wings,
J just landed it, K kept the key, L looped the loop, M made the
engine, N named it, O opened the door, P piloted it, Q quit the
job, R rode in it, S stopped it, T towed it, U unfastened the seat-
belt, V vacuumed it, W watched the movie, X exited, Y yawned
on it, Z zoomed into the air.

David Booth: It reinforces the fact that the language they are using is quality language, not made-up language simply used for learning to read and write. When we read to children we want to read only the finest and the best, whether it's the word or the pattern.

Jo Phenix: An interesting thing about the alphabet book is that the children look at a lot of their ABC books as they are doing this, and they find out that a lot of the patterns are in the letters. For example, they don't know many words with "q", so it was interesting to make a list of those words and then decide which ones they could use in the story, and they started looking in other ABC books to find out the words they used for X and which letters were more difficult.

This one is a pattern from "Q is for Duck". It didn't take the children long to catch on to the pattern of that one.

A is for trampoline. Why? Because the trampoline has acrobats.

3. "A Was Once an Apple Pie", in B. Ireson, *The Faber Book of Nursery Verse* (London: Faber and Faber, 1958).



David Booth: The answers are written upside down.

Jo Phenix: It's interesting to see, too, which children bother to turn the page and which ones just go ahead and read it upside down.

B is for house. Why? Because a house is built.
C is for baby. Why? Because the baby cries.
D is for fire. Why? Because a dragon breathes fire.
E is for volcano. Why? Because a volcano erupts.

David Booth: They are putting much more symbolic thought in this one, aren't they? They are really fooling with the language, working with the concept, and building a whole new pattern.

Jo Phenix: In this one, the children made a list first of all the things they do in the snow and then did the illustrations for them. Then, working as a group, the illustrations were sequenced and the story was dictated, then cut and pasted together. It starts in the morning.

One day I woke up, I looked out of the window. It was snowing. I put my clothes on, I put my shirt and my sweater and my leg warmers and my pants on.

This particular one is illustrated with cut-and-paste collage as a model of the Ezra Jack Keats book, *A Snowy Day*.

I put on my snowpants, my boots, my mittens, my coat, my hat, my earmuffs, and my scarf. I was ready to go. Then I picked up my friend. She came outdoors. We rolled a big snowball.⁴

(That's a direct copy from the John Burningham story.⁵ They liked that idea.)

We made a snowman with buttons out of raisins, a carrot nose and a licorice mouth. We dressed him in a scarf, mitts, and a hat. We fed the birds some bread, crackers, popcorn, and bird seed. We made some angels in the snow. And dug and dug and dug and made tunnels in the snow. We went in to see what it felt like. It felt freezing and wet. We made an igloo. We made a

4. E. J. Keats, *A Snowy Day* (New York: Viking, 1962).

5. J. Burningham, *The Snow* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1974).

big pile of snow and dug out the insides and crowded inside and played. We saw bird tracks, dog tracks, stick tracks. We made sculptures. The snow has to be hard. We took a sharp stick and carved it. We skated on the pond and I fell down. It felt cold and I bumped my head. My friend and I fell down together. I went down the hill with the sled with my friend, I held on to my friend. When we came home we saw the Christmas lights on the house. They shone on my face. I felt bright and happy as if it was almost Christmas. I took off my winter clothes. We had hot chocolate; it was hot and sweet and it smelled chocolatey. I liked the marshmallows, it made me feel happy. We warmed our hands in front of the flaming fire. We sang carols and watched Christmas specials. It was night. It was still snowing. My friend went home. I went to bed. I felt tired. I would dream about everything I did today. I hope it snows tomorrow.

They ended the story the same way John Burningham did.

David Booth: You have there a compendium of two styles rather than two syntactic patterns, don't you? They are beginning to apply the style of authorship to their own work. Sometimes they use the syntactic pattern to build their own work on.

Jo Phenix: This one is a direct pattern. It's from "The Ants Go Marching", by Bernie.

The ants go marching, one by one, up and out of the earth, zigging and zagging in a long line. Where are they marching, one by one? Do they know? Do they know?

Michelle took this pattern and decided to write a story about bears. She writes:

The bears go thumping one by one, up a log, through the grass, up and up in a long line. Where are they thumping, one by one? Do they know? Do they know?

Two by two the bears go thumping, up a tree, down again, over a stone, under a ladder, through the flowers. Almost last comes Baby Bear. Where are they thumping, two by two? Do they know? Do they know? Three by three the bears go thumping, Baby Bear stops beside a rock. Up he climbs, down again. A caterpillar crawls away. Where are they thumping, three by three? Do they know? Do they know?

And a counting story:

One rainy Tuesday morning, while on my way to school, I saw two shivering geese flying away, one wet puddle freezing, near the little path through the woods. One windy Wednesday morning, while on my way to school, I saw three shivering geese flying away, two wet puddles freezing, one yellow leaf falling, near the little path through the woods. One thundering Thursday morning, while on my way to school, I saw four shivering geese flying away, three wet puddles freezing, two yellow leaves falling, one cold squirrel gathering nuts near the little path through the woods. One foggy Friday morning, while on my way to school, I saw five shivering geese flying away, four wet puddles freezing, three yellow leaves falling, two cold squirrels gathering nuts, one chilly child wearing a warm coat near the little path through the woods. One snowy Saturday morning, while on my way to the synagogue, I saw six shivering geese flying away, five wet puddles freezing, four yellow leaves falling, three cold squirrels gathering nuts, two chilly children wearing warm coats, one soft snowflake swirling, near the little path through the woods. One freezing Sunday morning, while on my way to the church, I saw seven shivering geese flying away, six wet puddles freezing, five yellow leaves falling, four cold squirrels gathering nuts, three chilly children wearing warm coats, two soft snowflakes swirling, one cheerful snowman grinning near the little path through the woods. One cloudy Monday morning, while on my way to school, I saw geese flying, puddles freezing, leaves falling, squirrels gathering, children wearing coats, snowflakes swirling, snowmen grinning. Why? It's winter.

David Booth: There is a climax there as well. They have also used cultural patterns: days of the week and counting backwards.

Jo Phenix: A lot of interesting things went on during the writing of this one, too, because at first it was just a bare list of geese and puddles and leaves and squirrels, and the children, on a second draft, went back, and added some of the other words to that. It happened by chance that one of the children noticed the alliteration there, "chilly children", and then they went back and started to change some of the other words to make that happen in other parts of the story, too.

David Booth: Their word awareness came after the ideas, and they wanted to refine and edit their own ideas that way. And the sounds help, don't they?

Jo Phenix: Everything that is listed on the page is shown in the illustrations, so if it says "six shivering geese" there *are* six shivering geese in the picture. So it really forced them to put the detail into the illustrations too.

David Booth: Sometimes telling is a basic way for the child to start, isn't it?

Jo Phenix: It is, yes. The children like to hear the same stories over and over, and they memorize the story patterns. This is Andrea's story, "The Beanstalk".

Once upon a time in a faraway land, there lived a princess and all around they were poor. One day there was a storm and the palace's window opened and the princess was gone. Then one day Mickey saw the cow between the beans. Mickey ran home. "I got one bean." "Beans, beans?" said Donald. "They're not ordinary beans," said Mickey. Donald threw the beans out the window. That night the beans started to grow and grow and grow. The next morning Mickey woke up with a surprise. He called to Donald and Goofy. They climbed and climbed and climbed until they came to the top. And then they saw a big castle ...

David Booth: So in this story we have a Disney character appearing and she has the foundations of fairy tale, the qualities of fairy tale, the story grammar embedded in the writing.

Jo Phenix: She does. She really likes things like "to grow and grow and grow, and they climbed and climbed and climbed ..." She uses that a lot in her writing.

David Booth: How does it end?

Jo Phenix:

Then they found the princess. “How did you get there?” “A giant captured me,” she said. “A giant,” said Mickey. “Yes,” she said. They all heard her. Then the giant made her sing a song and he fell asleep. They quietly took her. Then they were at the bottom. Mickey hurried, and the giant was dead, and they put the princess back in the castle and they lived happy ever after.

Julie’s story “Cinderella Monkey” came as a result of a movie called *Cinderella Penguin*, a retelling of the Cinderella story.

Once upon a time there lived a monkey named Ella. She was very pretty. She had two stepsisters who were vain and ugly and mean, and a very, very mean stepmother. Ella lays the ashes, so they called her Cinderella. Every day they stuck a bucket of water and a mop in her hand. One day the doorbell rang and Cinderella said, “I’ll get it.” “A message!” “Let me see,” cried the two stepsisters. And then Cinderella said, “Can I see?” “Sure, but you can’t go. Only if you finish all your chores.” “So what if I do finish all my chores today?” “We’ll see about that. But before you do all your chores, you have to tell Mom and fix my clothes.” “Mine too.”

David Booth: How do you think they acquire this understanding of how a story functions?

Jo Phenix: By hearing a lot of stories and by reading a lot of stories, by reading stories many, many times, by taking part right in the story and joining in, chanting along with the story.

David Booth: This one has moved to a literary form immediately.

Jo Phenix: Paris comes from a Greek family and his mother tells him the Greek stories, over and over again, and when Paris came to school, he knew them well. Paris will go for quite a long time without writing very

much at all, or anything of much value. Then, when he is ready, he starts to write one of his stories, such as "Hercules".

Once upon a time there was a boy called Hercules. One day Hercules was in his crib. Two poisonous snakes went there. Hercules strangled them with his hand. From that day Hercules was a hero of all making. Hercules grew up and went to school and learned many things. Most of all Hercules liked to help people. The people believed Hercules was a son of God, or God, because he was so strong. Goddess Hera was very jealous and made Hercules do something bad. When Hercules realized what he did, he prayed to God Apollo what he could do to purify himself. Hercules was commanded to do the twelve labours that were impossible for any other ordinary man.

David Booth: And how old was Paris?

Jo Phenix: Paris was just seven.

David Booth: Read us another one he's written.

Jo Phenix: This one is "Prince of Troy". It took him a long time to write this one because he was a little embarrassed about his name.

David Booth: Because his own name is in it?

Jo Phenix: Yes.

Once upon a time there was a queen and a king, and they had a baby called Paris. One day the queen had a bad dream. She dreamed that the city of Troy was going to be burned. They asked when it was going to be. The answer was that one day Prince Paris was going to burn the city of Troy. The king was very worried. He decided to send Paris away. A shepherd took Paris to his cottage. Slowly Paris grew up and helped the shepherd. One day at the Olympus there was a celebration.

All the gods and goddesses; they forgot to invite goddess Aris. She was very upset of that. She decided to spoil the party. Goddess Aris threw a golden apple into the celebration, it was marked for the fairest. All the goddesses wanted the apple. God Zeus decided that judgement should be by Paris, the shepherd's son, who was really prince of Troy. All the goddesses promised him power, but goddess Aphrodite offered him the fairest woman. Paris gave the apple to goddess Aphrodite.

David Booth: Where do you think the child gets these amazing structures and vocabulary and formality of language?

Jo Phenix: Paris is an avid reader. He is a boy who likes to be by himself and any spare moment that he's got he goes out by himself and he reads. He reads constantly. So it's partly the old tradition in his family, a lot of storytelling in the family, and ...

David Booth: This may be the best example of how our own words and the words of others combine in our own literary structures, in our own literary patterns.

Jo Phenix: It's interesting that the other children recognize this quality in Paris's writing too. Paris has a lot of respect in the class as a writer. I'd like to read the end of this story. The story structure in here, the detail, and the sequence in the story are just phenomenal. He doesn't miss any parts of it. And he talks about Menelaus and the Trojan war and the wooden horse, and the story of Achilles. It's all in here, and he ends his story saying:

Prince Paris fought until death for his country and his love.
Its army won the war by the clever scheme of the wooden
horse. This is the end of the Trojan war and the most beautiful
love of Paris and Helen.

David Booth: This brings up another point that if they write about what they feel is important and use the structure that touches them, then their writing will be more powerful than if I inflict one pattern or style on them.

Jo Phenix: No other children in the class could write this way, and it's interesting that in between these stories that Paris writes he'll spend maybe two or three weeks writing things of very little quality. This is something that's important to him, it matters, and he seems to put all his writing energy into this.

David Booth: If the children are inundated with a format or genre so that they have a hundred folk tales, the story grammar becomes embedded right in their psyche. They have no difficulty using it.

What format do you have to help the children express their own intuitive emotional feelings and ideas and concerns?

Jo Phenix: I think the children do this best when it's something that does really concern them, and that's something that you can't plan for. When they are ready to write something personal, they do.

David Booth: But do you ever notice that what you've read triggers in the child his own emotional response?

Jo Phenix: It often does because the children often read stories together, in which case they'll talk to each other about the story, and if a story has been read in class, either read aloud by me or one of the other children, or read as a group, then they will talk about the story and apply it to their own experience.

This is "When I Was Sick", by Anita.

One day I was sick. My friend came over. She brought me some flowers to make me feel better. I said, "Thank you." She said, "You're welcome." Then my other friend came over too, and she gave me flowers. And I said, "Thank you," and I felt better from the flowers my friends brought. They knew that I would feel better. I was happy. I felt better and I was very surprised. When one of my friends just went home, my other friend was surprised too. My friend said, "Maybe it's because she catches your germ, because she catches all of her friends' germs. So I guess she doesn't want to get a cold." And she said, "I think I should go home too so I don't catch your cold." "But then who will play with me?" "Play with someone else that's sick too." Then my mom gave me some hot chocolate and I felt better. But I had very much fun at home. I even had lunch in bed. I never knew that when you're sick it's still good fun.

David Booth: She's taking her own experience and giving it a literary format.

Jo Phenix: And she's putting some humour in there too.

David Booth: Their use of dialogue, when do you notice that happening?

Jo Phenix: That often happens right from the start too. Sometimes they're not aware of it as dialogue, and it's just a thought stream.

David Booth: And do you give them quotation marks?

Jo Phenix: That's something that they seem to learn very quickly, that when you talk about somebody talking on their page, they can recognize it, and I found they learn quotation marks very easily, and they like to use them. It's the first punctuation they usually learn. Once they've used it they use it forever afterwards. They never forget it.

David Booth: What if a group has an experience they want to write down?

Jo Phenix: This particular one came as a result of the book "Some Day" by Charles, and the children had quite a long discussion about the things that they would really like some day. So this book is a collection of their ideas.

Some day I will go to my house and Edna will say, "Three cheers for Kim, the good, good girl." Some day my mother and father are going to say, "You can have your own treehouse." Some day I will go to my bedroom and see my brother clean my room. Some day I will see Michael Jackson in person. Some day I will go to the park and will say, "Want to be friends? We want to be your friends." Some day I will learn to swim. Some day I will come home and my brother will give me a present. Some day my mother and father are going to say, "Eat all the strawberries, won't you?" Some day I will go to school and Miss Phenix will say, "Don't do your jobs, Jason." Some day I will go to school and someone will say, "You're the best guy in school."

David Booth: Those are full of emotional content, aren't they? Each one of those.

Jo Phenix: Yes, because the children had to be selective. They only had one idea to write.

David Booth: That group thing forces them also to be careful and considerate of what they use. What kind of aesthetic growth do you think they have after this kind of reading and writing combination? Are they better at choosing books, do they like books, are books part of their lives?

Jo Phenix: There comes a point where you see them choosing books because of the content. Right at the beginning they've had to choose books that either have good pictures or the ones they think are easy to read. But suddenly they choose books because they are interested in the content, in what's in the book. And I think that's the breakthrough for them in reading.

David Booth: Do they ever go after particular authors?

Jo Phenix: Yes, they do. In fact, we used to have an author of the week, and we have author collections. Arnold Lobel was a favourite, A. A. Milne for a while, John Burningham at present. You find the style of the author coming through in their writing, too.

David Booth: Do you think that this kind of literature approach has any effect on their development as humans? Do they become better people?

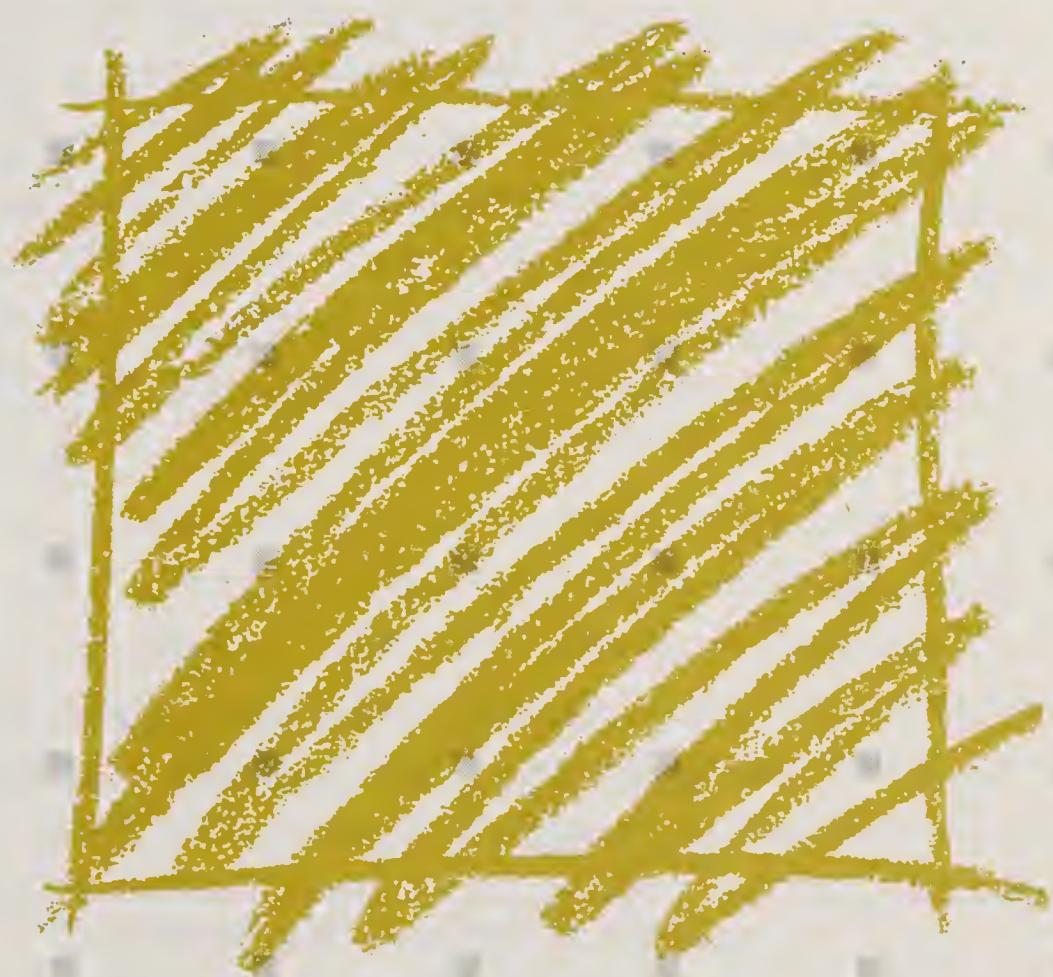
Jo Phenix: I think they do, because with the reading and their writing and the sharing of their own writing they become aware of audience, they become aware of what other people are thinking about things, and aware of different points of view. They sometimes start off being very critical of each other and they become sensitive to the kind of things you say to somebody about writing, and about their idea. It's hard for little children to accept other people's ideas and to listen when other people talk, and I think this kind of experience in sharing helps them.

David Booth: Would you say this kind of embedded language play and usage remain with them at the school?

Jo Phenix: I think it does, yes. I think it does because you see it in their writing, you see it in the games they play, you see the patterns going out on the playground and the patterns from their games coming back into the classroom.

The imaginative writing produced by the children in Jo Phenix's class testifies to her skill as a teacher. She takes them beyond straight word recognition. Texts have meaning. She encourages the children to imagine, to picture what the words say, and to seek and play with the patterns inherent in the language. The children in Jo Phenix's class are lucky. They are actively engaged in the stories they read and in the ones they write – engaged in their “own words” and in the “words of others”.

Cross-Age Tutoring in Writing





Cross-Age Tutoring in Writing

Beverley Allinson

Introduction

The course described here was developed over a three-year period, largely in inner-city schools. It is designed to increase the communication skills of adolescents by partnering them with Kindergarten/Grade 1 children in co-operative activities related to storytelling.

In one school, six Grade 7 students volunteered to "work with small children and make up stories". In another, homeroom teachers chose twelve Grade 7/8 students from two classes to work on the project. Three Kindergarten-Grade 1 teachers and their students participated.

The resulting groups represented children with a wide range of ability and language competence, and with a variety of ethnic origins and cultural backgrounds.

In both schools, a particular room became the workshop space; an open-area resource centre in one instance, a conventional classroom in the other. The older students were encouraged to choose a private space for their writing, and this soon became the accepted practice. They would regroup in the central area when they were done, to share their writing if they chose to. When the Primary children came to the workshops this pattern of movement in and out of the larger group easily included them. By that time the older students modelled confidently and purposefully.

The Course

Two simultaneous workshops took place during January and February 1983. The course consisted of ten consecutive half-day sessions and developed as follows:

Phase 1: Themes and responses

Intensive storybook reading. Writing in response to emerging themes.

Phase 2: Cross-age tutoring

Visits to Primary classrooms. Observation. Interaction.

Primary children attend workshops. Partnering.

Phase 3: Story writing

The older students plan and draft stories for the Primary children.

Themes and Responses

Central to the program is a collection of storybooks that young children enjoy. It includes some titles that have been favoured by generations of readers, though most are contemporary. The selection includes resourceful female characters and male characters who express their feelings, and is as representative of the ethnic makeup of Metro schools as present publications allow. A large percentage of the stories have Canadian authors.

Each title, directly or obliquely, relates to the young reader's interest, concerns, and experience. The stories are about growing up, about family life, about friendship and conflict, fear and achievement. They feature characters who celebrate triumphs, or who overcome feelings of anger or jealousy or frustration with adults who don't understand. Many of the stories make the children laugh, sometimes in response to the humour in an event or situation, more often in delighted recognition of a childhood truth.

The older students experienced these stories in a number of ways. They were read to, they sampled for themselves, they read to one another, and they read aloud to the group. Listening to stories was favoured. Like their younger counterparts, the older students were often spellbound by a well-told story. The occasional appearance of one they loved to hear when young prompted excited recollections. Those who had forgotten, or for whom the theme had not then resonated, and those

who heard the story for the first time, were soon involved in the spirited discussion that followed such a reading.

Each student was given a particular title to peruse and asked to consider the factors that made the story a popular one. They then chose either to read the story to the group or to present a report. The ensuing discussion gradually led to a shared understanding of the authors' intentions and methods. Students were encouraged to respond to the aptness and truth of the emotional content, to consider what the writer knew to be true of young children.

Particularities of style, structure, rhyme, rhythm, and repetition were noted as the sample grew and stories could be compared and contrasted. In time, students discovered that certain themes reappeared and that writers explored them in a variety of ways. Later, when they had the opportunity to experiment with different forms and styles in their own story writing, the collection invariably influenced their writing. Throughout this process, the collection grew steadily until there were forty or so titles in circulation. Eventually, the students selected titles they would share with a young partner, and wrote about their choice. (Publication information on these and other titles appears in the bibliography at the end of this essay.)

Noisy Nora

I think children would like this book because it is about a girl who wanted attention from her parents and she tried to get it by being noisy. Most children make a lot of noise so they would like this story. They would also like the pictures. She's a mouse. It's told in rhyme.

Gordon (age 11)

Jim Meets the Thing

When Jim met the thing on television. I couldn't imagine how scary the thing was until I saw the thing in Jim's dream. I thought it resembled a dragon-like creature. I myself sometimes is scared by creatures on television. I think the moral of the story is "we're all scared of something, but we shouldn't be ashamed of it" but I'm not sure.

Matthew (age 12)

Swimmy

Swimmy is the book I chose to share with the small kids. Why I pick *Swimmy* is because many kids always feel they are alone, or they are different from the others. That is what Swimmy felt when all his companies were gone. When Swimmy was travelling alone in the big ocean he saw many interesting creatures and he learnt that the world is beautiful.

Sze Wa (age 13)

The storybook themes quickly established a rich reference bank and provided a feelings-focused content for the course. Reading about characters like themselves encouraged both age groups to write with increasing confidence about their keenest interests and their deepest concerns.

The older students needed little encouragement to write about incidents from their childhood. The writing that followed shared talk led to swift and sure narrations about being lost, having temper tantrums, and dealing with bullies, nightmares, and monsters in the dark.

Some titles are particularly effective in prompting such writing. For example, *Benjamin and Tulip* is a skilful and funny story about two racoons and a rough start to a friendship. Tulip bullies the meek Benjamin in a series of incidents that lead to a satisfying resolution and the end of hostilities. The story triggered the following response:

It happened when I first came to Park School. I was new and I only knew a few people. But there was one particular boy his name was Derek. I only knew him a little bit because he was my brother's friend's brother. I was very shy because when I go to new places I get very quiet. One day he seemed to be trying me out to see how I would react. So he called me a name.

I ignored him hoping he would stop. Every time he seen me he would hit me or call me a name. Sometimes I would try and hit him back but he seemed to keep doing it more. I decided if I tried hard enough I would be able to avoid seeing him. I used to go and come to school through the front door because everybody including Derek used to go through the school yard in the back. One day he must have noticed it because he was in the front when I was coming home from school. I tried to pretend that I didn't see him. He walked about four paces behind me and called me every name in the book but I wouldn't turn around. He thought of another process of getting my attention

by throwing rocks, but I still ignored him. Then he finally had the nerve to come up and hit me. I could not take it any more so I grabbed him tripped him onto the ground and kept hitting him. Naturally he hit me back. I gave him a punch. I never usually punch people but I was so mad I got the nerve to punch him. That must have made him realize I wasn't joking because he stopped bugging me from then on. To tell the truth we get along pretty good now. In this story I was like Benjamin.

Sharon (age 12)

A reluctant-to-write student produced the following:

There was one time in my life when I have been like Tulip. I had this friend named Cindy and she has a little brother named Robert we had to share a balcony and she used to sleep over a lot and we use leave her balcony door open because it led into her room and she had a lock on her door and the second door on the balcony was mine so we used to lock my bedroom door and walk from my room to hers then we went down stair of her apartment into her brothers room and poured sugar and toothpaste all over the bed his floor and him we then took some sewing string and wrapped it all around him then she took his slippers we went up to the kitchen and pour I think it was tomato juice in them took some of her fathers rum put it in a glass wiped some on his lips and put the glass on the floor ran up to her room closed her balcony door behind us ran into my room the next morning we got in trouble but it was fun.

Sandy (age 12)

Sandy later chose this as her most satisfying piece of writing and commented:

All kids love mischief but hate to get into trouble and what made it even better was because I was doing it with a friend and didn't get into as much trouble with my parents than if I was by myself.

Students enjoyed groping for memories. When asked to shape fragments into a short narrative piece they responded as follows:

A very long time ago, when I was just able to walk by myself, my father took a walk with me to a nearby pier somedays after dinner. Sometimes we went weekly, but sometimes we did not

go for once in a month. We could see the sunset, some fishermen cleaning their boat, some ferries were coming across the sea. My father's and my shadow shaded a part of the shiny beach. We walked along the beach until the moon took the sun's place.

Sze Wa (age 13)

I remember my old house and the kitchen counter. My mother always sat on it when she was on the phone. I would look up at her, trying to see her face. I would fall over from straining my neck backwards. Then I would cry and my mother would pick me up and put me on the counter. I could look over the entire kitchen. Boy, I wouldn't want to fall from up here! But then my mother would hang up the phone and put me down, telling me to run along to a friend's house or play with my brothers. The kitchen was no longer mine, but I was its. I was engulfed in the hugeness of everything. But it's no more, for I'm big now and can reach the counter from the floor.

Derek (age 14)

Several students chose their writing about a childhood memory as their favourite piece.

The most satisfying piece of writing was the one where we went back to the earliest age. I felt satisfied because it was amazing to see my childhood displayed on a piece of paper. The real joy was the innocence I possessed at such a young age and the amount of ignorance I also possessed.

Lisa (age 12)

Cross-Age Tutoring

Concurrently with the intensive reading and writing in response to emerging themes, the older students began to become familiar with the younger children.

During the first three workshops, groups of from three to four older students visited the classrooms for brief periods. They were free to sit and observe, roam and converse, become involved in activities at the various centres, and eventually to engage with a particular child for an extended period.

Back in the workshop setting, their impressions, opinions, and questions were shared through talk and writing. Records of the classroom visits were made as journal entries. Friends read one another's accounts.

In preparation for their first one-to-one encounter with their partners, the older students selected a story to read aloud, considered what they might talk about, and organized their work space so that both students could share the story and work in comfort.

In response to the story and conversation, the Primary children made up stories. Mostly they wrote about themselves. Sometimes they retold the story they had heard, with themselves as the central character.

Hearing Sendak's *Where The Wild Things Are* prompted the following:

One cold night I had a good dream. I dreamed I was on an island with friendly scary monsters with horns and big teeth. We had a party with lots of food. I got bored of it and woke up.

Angela (age 6)

Sometimes a theme triggered a personal anecdote. After hearing a story about sibling rivalry, one child wrote:

When I was smaller and wanted to go outside my sister said I couldn't so I got mad. I told my mother and she didn't do nothing. I threw my ball and hit my sister in the arm. She started yelling at me. She threw the ball at me but missed me. She started chasing me but she couldn't find me because I was hiding under the bed. I felt happy because she couldn't find me. Then I snuck up behind her and scared her. Then I didn't want to go outside so I watched TV.

Michael (age 5)

Often the young story-tellers introduced their own topic, writing about recent activities:

Yesterday I went to the K club to have some dinner. It was spaghetti but I missed the dinner. Because I had to go home to get the form to have dinner.

Alison (age 7)

Many of the Primary children were beginning readers. A few were beginning to write independently. With help, most could write captions to their drawings. Some used invented spelling, some used personal dictionaries and had their older partner print words in appropriate sections. Those who were not yet reading enjoyed hearing their stories read back to them and later to the group at large.

The older students discovered that their partners were eager to read and write. In the discussion that ended the first partnering session, they talked about the encounter and planned for their next meeting in their journals.

Two similar workshops followed. In general, the Primary children attended eagerly, interested in hearing more stories and talking with the older students. As the collaborations continued, the children increased in confidence as story-tellers. Most older students were genuinely interested in their young partners and enjoyed helping them. By trading experiences, admitting difficulties, and talking about frustrations and satisfactions, they developed techniques that helped them arouse and maintain their partners' interest and co-operation. They learned how to recapture a partner's wandering attention and how best to relate to a child who was shy or reluctant or obstreperous.

As receivers of the stories, the older students were encouraged to question and to extend the young child's writing by asking for detail to help shape the story's sequence:

When I give my fish some food he eats it so fast because he is hungry and when I shut the light the fish is scared and when I open the light he ain't scared. He is a boy. I could tell why he is a boy because he doesn't lay eggs. Sometimes the fish bowl is dirty. I put water in a bag. I wash the bowl and I take the rock out too. I carry the fish and I put it back in the bowl.

Elaine (age 6)

Above is what my partner Elaine dictated to me for the story she was writing. Today I feel is a nice day because before Elaine wouldn't hardly talk to me and now she isn't afraid any more. I think I got her out of her shell. Elaine is a very bright girl and

she seems to be very proud of what she done today. At first she wouldn't tell me a story so I asked her if she wanted to write it down herself. She said yes. Elaine kept on asking me how to spell words. I told her some letters but others I told her to sound out. After a while I took over the writing. We didn't get the pictures coloured in because we didn't have time so she told me that she would finish it at home. I feel that Elaine is eager to learn and I am eager to help her.

Pauline (age 12)

My mother bought a dog when I was six. I like pets a little. Sometimes I see a cat and I went out to give the cat some milk. I like the dog a little too. I like to keep the cat. Sometimes my dog chases the cat. One day the cat started to talk to me. "May I have some milk" the cat said. I gave him some milk. The dog chases the cat a lot. I said "stop" to the dog. The dog stop when I say stop.

Thang (age 6)

This was the story that my partner and I wrote. I think he wrote this story because I read a story to him that is like this. It was hard to get him to start because he kept saying I don't know, but I finally got him into it. He was interested in everything and especially what things are going to happen next. He asked me a lot of questions but I managed to answer every one of them before he went back to his classroom. I could see he was satisfied. I hope I could work with him again because I know that he would write a long story about What's Next!

Vinh-Kien (age 12)

A highly original story was written during the third collaboration with a partner skilled at questioning. The six-year-old in question was one of the most skilled and articulate. This was her first full-length imaginative story, begun at the workshop and finished at home.

Sammy wanted to be a giant because he was tired of being small. Sammy ate a magic peanut butter sandwich and turned into a giant. He was as tall as the CN Tower. His steps were as big as Dundas Public School. Now that Sammy was too big for his house, he decided to walk around Toronto to see if he could find a house big enough for him to live in. Now he was really tired and decided to go to sleep. When he woke up, he was

really hungry. Sammy ate ten pieces of bread and drank a whole jug of milk. It was a really hot day, so Sammy went to swim in Lake Ontario. Then he went to Niagara Falls to take a shower, because the fish got caught in his hair. Sammy wanted to turn back to his normal size. He made another peanut butter and jelly sandwich and he returned to a little boy. He then went outside to play soccer with his friends.

Jennifer (age 6)

Story Writing

The older students began to outline stories as their work with a partner continued. Drawing on the bank of themes and story lines, they developed ideas they thought suitable for their audience. They chose real characters, created new ones, planned likely events, and experimented with different plot lines and resolutions. They learned to select and reject ideas. Some made mock-up booklets. This technique of devising words and illustrations in conjunction motivated students slow to start and helped keep long-winded writers simple and to the point.

Vinh-Kien's scrutiny of "pop-up" stories and his application of this style of story-telling curbed his tendency to include his every thought in a piece of writing. His heavy head cold inspired the following:

Cold

There was once a boy named Peter who hated to go to school.

He loved to go out to fly his kite in the park.
He liked to play marbles, but he hated school.

One day he decided that if he had a cold, he wouldn't have to go to school.

So he started to look for one.
He looked in the closet but there wasn't a cold.
He looked in his pocket but there wasn't a cold.
At last, he looked in his nose, and there was the cold.

Peter was very happy that he had the cold and he told his mother about it.

His mother made him drink medicine and stay in bed.
He wasn't allowed to play marbles or fly his kite in the park.

Now Peter was miserable and he wanted to go to school.

Few students achieved this intelligent combination of humour and gentle moral. When writing to get a message across, they tended to be very heavy-handed indeed. A useful approach to discourage a hectoring tone emerged as the conversation turned to humour and the students shared examples from the storybook collection. Some were able to move beyond slapstick and insults as they discovered the effectiveness of whimsy, ludicrousness, and other more subtle forms that young children can appreciate. The work of Robert Munsch (*The Dark* and *Mud Puddle*) was particularly useful in this respect.

Many students wrote imaginary stories that featured their partner as the central character. After working for two sessions with Oy-Kengh, Matthew observed: "She was very shy at first and still is and I don't know how to make her feel more relaxed. She likes dolls a lot which is why I guess she made up her first story about one." Combining these insights, he began a story for her:

Up in her room, Oy-Kengh was playing with three little bears. The first bear was called Ben. The second bear was called Sue. The third bear was called Helen. Oy-Kengh loved the bears so much she wished they were real. In a sudden shot a falling star flew past her window. "A falling star," she thought, "I wish the bears were real," she said and closed her eyes and thought it over and over again. Then Ben yawned. Oy-Kengh didn't see because her eyes were still closed . . .

The Primary children were delighted to appear "in print", and some reciprocated by writing stories about their Senior partners. A lively exchange between partners occurred in one group when Cindy read Wagner's *John Brown, Rose and the Midnight Cat* to Jodi, who

promptly began a critical account of life with her new baby brother. By a happy coincidence, the storybook theme was the appropriate one to release Jodi's grievances. Cindy was sensitive to the feelings exposed and decided to write a fantasy in which Jodi wishes to be a baby again. She wrote this outline:

Jodi is lying in bed wishing she was her baby brother.

Next morning she wakes up and finds herself in a crib in a room full of toys and wallpaper with little teddy bears on it.

Her mother comes in and changes her diaper.

She gets fed in a high chair the way she wanted to be fed. Spills the milk and makes a lot of mess.

She doesn't have to go to school so she is very happy.

She wants to watch TV but her mother makes her take long naps.

She got so bored of taking long naps she wishes to be who she was again.

In the morning she is in her own room. She is sucking her thumb and had wet her bed.

Jodi is glad she is a big sister again.

In turn, Jodi wrote about Cindy as her baby-sitter. The story had a happy ending, but only after the baby-sitter had endured a series of Jodi-instigated pranks.

The students began many stories and completed some. In a few instances, second and third attempts were drafted. The writing in progress was shared through the various stages, and the students were encouraged to build on each other's ideas. During these workshops there was adequate time to confer with each writer so that favoured ideas for stories could be discussed and developed. The individual folders of writing were fat by now.

At the final workshop the stories were read to the Primary children. With the smaller group it was possible to arrange a reading marathon. The six older students read and reread to three and four children at a time so that all of the stories were heard by all concerned. The students in the larger group read their stories to their partner – and any interested other – in a loosely structured session.

At the end of the course, teachers' comments were invited. Generally, the Grade 7/8 teachers found that students had improved in attitude and in their practice of writing. Some weeks later, it was reported that three students had voluntarily visited the Primary rooms for further cross-age tutoring experiences.

Primary teachers attributed children's heightened interest in the written word to successful partnerships in the workshop context. Some children were writing independently for the first time; others were producing longer and more detailed stories.

Ultimately, the three separate phases of the course (intensive reading, cross-age tutoring, and story writing) coalesced into a powerful experience about the pleasures of reading and writing. On a human level, the children increased their sensitivity to literature and to each other. The older partners, particularly the ESL students, demonstrated a marked increase in confidence and language competence; withdrawn children learned to extend themselves; the impatient learned to practise tolerance; and poorly motivated children found a sense of focus in the partnership. On a technical level, all the children learned a great deal about the practical problems of making stories – about how to make sense out of words and put them in an intelligible order.

When children talk about something they really know, individual voices begin to emerge. Others listen and begin to write and act with increasing certainty. Elements in the program are surely conducive to the development of such behaviour. Though there are no formulas for success with every young person, many of the practices described in this report reach the majority most of the time.

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Six Magic Words





Six Magic Words

Brenda Protheroe

The last Grade 13 class of the year at Vaughan Road Collegiate is marked by tears, embraces, and the frantic outpouring of friendship and nostalgia onto the pages of the yearbook. It is a rite of passage, an unspoken acknowledgement that one phase of life is past and a new one about to begin. Not wishing to interfere with the intensity of this ritual, I had decided not to finish our reading of Ted Hughes' *The Iron Man*,¹ which I had begun reading aloud, chapter by chapter, several weeks before. Most students agreed, with just a trace of regret, vowing to borrow or buy the book and finish it on their own. Two young men, however, insisted that they *had* to finish the book, that they could not go on with the rest of their lives until they found out what happened to the Iron Man and, having found refuge and relative quiet in a corner of the room, they spent the remainder of the period taking turns reading the book to each other. I was struck by two things: by the powerful hold of *The Iron Man* and by the fact that the finishing of this piece of literature became for those two young men a part of their rite of passage into adulthood.

We started the children's literature unit in April. By that time, the students had already heard, seen, and discussed many books (mostly picture books, including the two that provoked the most discussion, Russell Hoban's *The Dancing Tigers*² and Jenny Wagner's *John Brown, Rose and the Midnight Cat*³) as a result of a routine established at the beginning of the year of weekly fifteen- to twenty-minute readings. (For a fuller list of appropriate books, see the bibliography at the end of this essay.) I did most of the reading, but we also had several guest readers. The students reacted variously to my announcement that I was about to read a "children's book" to them – I detected looks and sounds ranging from disdain to curiosity to enthusiasm, none of which surprised me.

1. T. Hughes, *The Iron Man* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968).

2. R. Hoban, *The Dancing Tigers* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1979).

3. J. Wagner, *John Brown, Rose and the Midnight Cat* (Harmondsworth, Mx.: Penguin, 1977).

What did surprise me, however, was what happened in both classes once I began to read. The desks were in a large circle so that there was an open space in the middle of the room. Two sentences into the story a hand shot up with a request to be allowed to sit on the floor. Making the move a few at a time as the spirit caught them, all but four or five of the thirty hulking Grade 13 bodies in each class spent the first few of their weekly story sessions huddled together reliving, they said, treasured moments and feelings from the past.

The centrepiece of the unit itself was the production of student-written and -illustrated story books that would appeal to children and the “testing” of those books in our junior feeder schools. Much of the work was done on the students’ own time, but several activities leading up to the creation of the books were completed in class time, often in small-group situations. These activities included storytelling “exercises”, a group composition of a modernized fairy tale, the reading and discussion in small groups of selected books followed by a writing activity, and a “fantasy journey”. The other component of the unit was a “research assignment”, which is described below.

I chose two simple, widely used storytelling “warm-up exercises” to begin the unit. Students working in groups of four or five used such “starters” as, “There was an old woman who lived on a hill . . .”, “Once, long ago, the Sun and the Moon fell in love . . .”, and “The meanest person I ever knew . . .”. One after another they added to the developing story and eventually brought it to a conclusion. Then, still in groups, they retold in the same fashion a fairy tale they remembered from childhood, embellishing it with as much detail as possible. They had great fun doing this, and it served to set the tone for the rest of the unit and to start the creative juices flowing. Some groups attempted to make their stories rhyme, others used irony or satire, and one group coined a series of new words to describe their “meanest person”.

The modernized fairy tales were written during one period and shared with the class the next. The students rediscovered the difficulties and rewards of group composition and produced funny and clever results, often with overtones of political satire and social commentary. The most applauded was a rendition of "Cinderella" told from Cinderella's point of view in southern-California "Valley Girl" lingo, which was popular at the time.

The next step involved the collection in advance of a large number of children's picture books, one for each student in the class. Because of my interest in children's literature I had ten or fifteen in my own collection that I had not already read to them and was able to supplement these with a supply from the English co-ordinator's office. A children's literature unit for use in Grade 12 general-level English programs in the City of York had been prepared the summer before, and a box full of books purchased to accompany the unit, and I was lucky enough to have access to this resource. (It is also, of course, easy to gather books from local public and school libraries and from the students themselves. Several of my students brought in books they had loved as children, and most of them had stories about favourite books and folk tales and legends told by Italian, Greek, and West Indian parents and grandparents.)

I think it is important to make sure that the books used at this stage are of high quality. My preference was for well-illustrated books telling a well-developed story with imaginatively drawn characters and settings. Although several were brought in, I avoided the Walt Disney-type books featuring such well-known cartoon characters as Mickey Mouse and the Smurfs. The characters and plots tend to be predictable and of limited complexity and nuance.

The students were again divided into groups of four or five (several groups were sent off to the seminar rooms in the library to cut down on the din in the classroom, as roars of approval and explosions of laughter and delight greeted the reading of many of the books). Each student was

instructed to read his or her book aloud to the others and then to lead a discussion of as many of the following topics as possible: illustrations, appeal to child or adult, feelings, values, symbols, images, motifs, themes, and language patterns. I wanted to introduce an element of critical analysis to prepare them for what would be expected of them in their “research assignments”. We then had a general, whole-class discussion of the books and the topics and they were assigned a piece of writing, the first draft of which was to be ready for the following class. Basing their writing on the book they had read, they were to: (a) write an account of a similar real-life experience they had had; (b) retell the story from a different point of view; (c) write and record two radio “sales pitches” for the book, one aimed at children and the other at parents; (d) write and record a radio drama script; or (e) write and record a radio commentary. The rough drafts were then revised, edited, and recorded (where appropriate). The “sales pitches” and radio scripts and commentaries were the most popular choices, and the “products” were delightful! The students displayed great awareness and mastery of the various techniques of soft-sell seduction, hard-sell hucksterism, humour, and parody. As someone who normally loathes (and will do anything to avoid) marking, I was shocked to find myself actually enjoying the evaluation of student work during this unit.

The “fantasy journey”, followed by a written account of the journey, was the last in-class activity of the unit and required the teacher to provide stimuli for the students’ imaginations. The students were most pleased by this activity and found that they were able to develop details of setting and character they later used in their books. I began by asking them to make themselves comfortable, to close their eyes, breathe deeply and quietly, concentrate on my words, and let their minds and imaginations see whatever they wished. Then, speaking softly and pausing frequently to allow them time to explore and embroider the images in their mind’s eyes, I talked them out of their seats, through the opened ceiling (propelled and supported by a huge balloon), and through the sky

to a landscape in another time and another world inhabited by beings of their own creation. It is important, I think, to draw their attention to details of the landscape and beings, sounds, colours, textures, smells, etc. It is possible to incorporate into a story phrases like “something strange is happening”, “notice how the beings are reacting”, or “observe how the situation is resolved”. The story line will be sketchy at best, but the students will be encouraged to think in terms of plot development. I was careful to bring the students back to the classroom from their fantasy world and to allow them a few seconds to review and reflect upon their journeys. I should have posted a notice on the door asking anyone who arrived late to wait for a signal to come in. One young man entered just as everyone had begun to relax and concentrate and was greeted with some hostility!

The students had been told at the beginning of the unit that they would be required to produce a book of their own, and during the time spent on the activities previously described they were also thinking, planning, writing, revising, illustrating or conscripting illustrators, editing, organizing, and book making. I had told them that it was not necessary for them to do their own illustrations but that they could arrange (by whatever means, including, I fear, coercion!) for a brother, sister, or fellow student to do the illustrations. Most did their own, but the artists of the school soon found themselves in great demand among the others. I was totally unprepared for – as well as surprised and delighted by – the excellence of the sixty books that they produced, and I cannot begin to describe the diversity of the results, the time, energy, and care that went into them, and the feelings of pleasure and pride they produced in the students. We spent a whole period reading them, marvelling at them, and enjoying them. They were truly “works of art”.

One of the things that inspired the students, I believe, was their understanding that a real audience existed for their work and that they would personally present it to that audience. There was a fair amount of

nervousness surrounding the visits to the junior feeder schools. The students had secured a promise from me that they would not be exposed to anyone above Grade 3 ("The older ones are killers"!) and that they could work in pairs. I in turn had made arrangements through the five extremely co-operative junior school principals or vice-principals for the students to spend time in at least one Primary classroom reading their books to the children with the teacher present. My students were eager to return to the schools from which they had graduated and that was arranged, where possible. The afternoon of the exodus arrived and off they went looking nervous. Some grumbled about not wanting to go, and some of the more macho young men worried about their images. One black-leather-jacketed individual arrived at the classroom to pick up his book (it was not "cool" to be seen carrying it around the school) and asked me if he *had* to go. I sent him on his way. When I saw him in the hall the next morning, the mournful expression of the day before had vanished. "I was a hero, miss! They thought I was Sylvester Stallone's brother!" Others had similar tales and were considerably buoyed up and excited by their receptions in the various classrooms they had visited. We spent a period exchanging stories, after which I asked them to write about their experiences. One young woman wrote the following account:

I can't believe it, I actually wrote a book! Not a short story or essay or poem, but a real book with illustrations. Once the book had been laminated and bound together and I held it in my hands, I felt a sudden surge of happiness and pride. Then, when I gazed upon the cover and saw the six magic words – written and illustrated by Yasna Medunic – I almost got up on my desk and screamed with ecstasy. Indeed, finishing my book was one of my finest moments. But then another challenge stood before me. I liked my book, my mother liked my book, but would the real critics, the children, like my book? That was the question. On May 11, 1983, I set off to J. R. Wilcox to find out.

I visited the Grade 2 class first. They were at their desks when I arrived. When I walked in they became very quiet as



they stared at me. I walked over to a chair and sat down. Their teacher told them I had come to read them a story. Their smiles widened and then they all rushed to sit at my feet. I told them my name and then we spent the next five minutes trying to guess where I was born. After a while I got to my story. As I read it I looked around at them. Their eyes were wide and their mouths were slightly opened. I continued, feeling a bit more confident. At the end they all clapped and then the questions started. When did I write the book? Why did I pick Sheldon as a name? Was I really eighteen years old? Did I have a boy-friend? Who drew the pictures? The questions were endless, but time was not. Soon I had to go, but not before they told me just how much they had liked my book. I don't think I've ever been praised quite so highly before. I left the class with my head in the clouds and my feet barely touching the ground.

The next class was a group of Grade 1 students. They were almost like the previous class except that they were much wilder; it took them about three minutes to get settled down. I thought I was in certain trouble. Would these kids sit quietly for five minutes and listen to me as I told them a tale about a short giraffe? For some reason I doubted it. I soon learned that there was a little boy in the class with the same name as my short giraffe. As I read everyone was quiet, some fidgeted at times, but they all listened. When I finished they clapped, but Sheldon, the little boy, a little louder than the rest. Unfortunately, only four children were allowed to ask questions and before I knew it, the teacher was thanking me for coming and expressing sympathy that I had to leave so soon. I waved to the children and left. As I skipped down the hallway I felt great. They had truly liked my book. Then and there I decided to go home and write something new for I had, for the first time, realized how it felt to have people really appreciate your work. I also realized that authors take pleasure in their work not just because they make money from book sales, but also because they enjoy it thoroughly. The smiles from the children made up for all the hours I had spent thinking up my tale, and all the nights I had sat up cutting out pictures. It was most certainly a worthwhile experience.

The "research assignment" was due three weeks after the books and was designed to introduce (in most cases) and reintroduce (in a few cases) the students to other genres, some of the "classics" of children's literature,

the work of certain authors, or selected fairy tales. The assignment required them to undertake a short (about three pages) exploration of the following topics:

- a) children's poetry;
- b) at least two books by C. S. Lewis, Kenneth Grahame, Arthur Ransome, Lewis Carroll, A. A. Milne, Russell Hoban (including *The Mouse and His Child*⁴), Susan Cooper, Rosemary Sutcliffe, or Lyn Cook;
- c) two different versions of *Hansel and Gretel* (Grimm), *Cinderella* (Perrault), or *Snow White* (Grimm) and the appropriate chapter of Bruno Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment*.⁵

They were directed to discuss characters, settings, values, themes, feelings, and appeal, and to explain why they liked or disliked the story or collection of poetry. In the case of (c) they were asked to discuss the differences between the two versions of the fairy tale, to outline Bettelheim's interpretation, and to comment on it. This topic proved, as expected, to be quite a challenge to those who chose it, but they did a superb job. Although the assignment lacked the "glamour" of the making and presenting of the books, I think it played an important role in the unit.

I cannot think of anything in my teaching career that has given me or my students as much satisfaction and reward as this unit. It is not presented here as "state of the art" or as a model to be emulated for there are many such units in use in classrooms in the province that are as good or better. It is offered, rather, in a spirit of shared enthusiasm for and belief in the joy and benefits of introducing secondary school students to the enormously rich diversity of children's literature. Although the prime

4. R. Hoban, *The Mouse and His Child* (New York: Avon Books, 1982).

5. B. Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment* (New York: Random House, 1977).

objective was to provide a literary experience for the Grade 13 students, there are also, I think, important implications for the literacy of the next generation. I may have oversold it a little but the class passwords became: “What are you going to do for your children?” “*Read to them!*”

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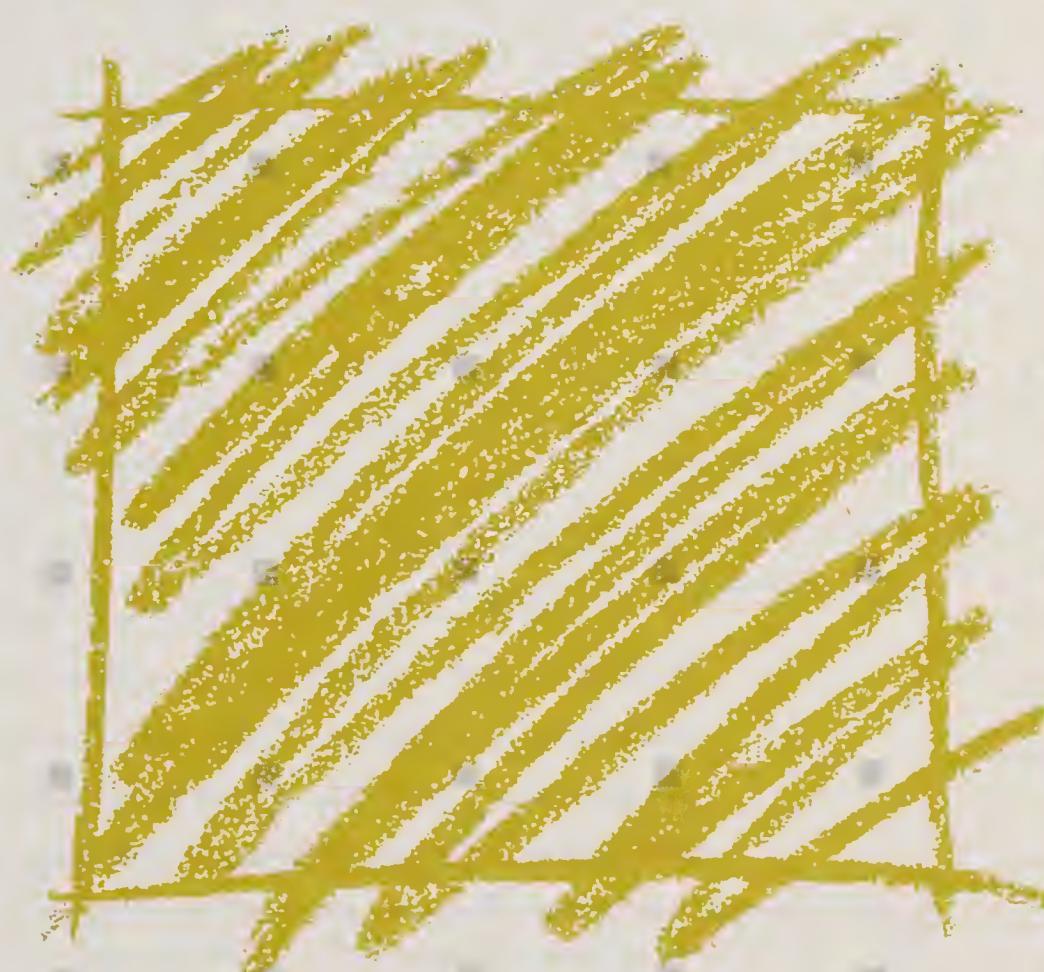
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Epilogue:

Share, Listen, Mediate



Epilogue: Share, Listen, Mediate

Lissa Paul

“What are you going to do for your children?” Brenda Protheroe asks the students in her class. “Read to them!” comes back the answer in chorus. At the beginning of *Growing With Books*, “share”, “listen”, and “mediate” are named as key refrains that ring through the book. They resonate powerfully in this section. A genuine love of stories that crosses age and grade boundaries is palpable between teachers and students. The authors of the articles and the child authors they quote all delight in stories – the ones they read and the ones they write – and in the sound and the sense of words, the shape and pattern of stories, and the images that words make.

It is their “hands-on” approach to reading and writing that makes the articles so compelling. All the teachers are in the thick of things, mucking about with words. The children in Jo Phenix’s class internalize the patterns of stories and make connections between words and meaning. That is because they consciously look at the patterns at work in the texts. They learn about alliteration. Struck by the sound of “chilly children”, they look for opportunities to introduce words to their own stories that create the same pleasing sounds. The children discover that they have something to say – so the techniques they learn are focused on the best possible ways to say what they mean. They understand what they are reading (and the cadences of spoken language) because, as Phenix says, they expect stories to mean something. So their stories are verbally and visually rich and witty: as in “A is for trampoline. Why? Because the trampoline has acrobats”; and in the imagist description of a rainbow’s reflection in a pond as, simply, “a rainbow in a pond”.

The value of sharing stories dominates the articles by Allinson and Protheroe. The children in Bev Allinson’s class shared experiences, admitted difficulties, and developed techniques to arouse interest and co-operation. They learned to think about words and pictures together and shared writing in progress. Brenda Protheroe’s group experienced

first hand the relationship between literature and life – the power of stories to bring people together. The older students listened to the little ones and were tickled to find themselves objects of adoration and admiration. Protheroe's account ends with a lovely affirmation of the value of her experience as something presented “in a spirit of shared enthusiasm for and belief in the joy and benefits of introducing secondary school students to the enormously rich diversity of children's literature”.

Reading and writing work in tandem; try to connect the stories you read in class with the kinds of stories the children write. With a class of beginning readers, you might listen to the kinds of things they talk about, both with you and with their peers. Eavesdrop discreetly. Once you have a sense of the hot gossip in the playground, you might use it as the basis for a story, to be composed collectively, individually, or in groups. Try to link what is being written with what is being read. For example, if Jenny (an imaginary student in your class) finds five dollars on her way to school today, you might read *Lost and Found* by Jill Paton Walsh,¹ or the Andersen tale “The Tinderbox”,² or the Grimm tale about the genie in the bottle,³ or *Do Not Open*.⁴ (Check with other teachers or the school librarian about other appropriate stories.) Then ask if anyone has a lost-and-found story he or she might like to tell. If the whole thing falls flat, try a different approach.

You might also talk about how writers think about composition. Read what Maurice Sendak or C. S. Lewis or E. B. White (or one of the class's current favourite authors) has to say about composition. Then consider how to apply what professional writers say about writing. If at all possible, have a writer come into your classroom to share stories

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1. Jill Paton Walsh, *Lost and Found* (London: André Deutsch, 1984).
 2. Hans Christian Andersen, “The Tinderbox”, in *The Complete Fairy Tales and Stories*, trans. Erik Christian Haugaard (New York: Doubleday, 1983), pp. 1-7.
 3. J. Grimm and W. Grimm, “The Spirit in the Bottle”, in *The Complete Grimm's Fairy Tales* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), pp. 458-462.
 4. Brinton Turkle, *Do Not Open* (New York: Dutton, 1985).

about writing with your students. Your teacher-librarian, board of education, or the Canadian Children's Book Centre, for example, may be able to supply information on how to get a writer into your class.

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Tucker, N. *The Child and the Book*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Books for Children

The authors in this section have provided a wealth of material for linking reading and writing. To isolate a few stories here would impoverish their accounts. So if you are looking for stories to trigger a writing session, look back to their articles and bibliographies.

Other Resources

The following organizations may help you contact authors you wish to invite to talk to your class:

Canadian Society of Children's Authors,
Illustrators, and Performers (CANSCAIP)
P.O. Box 280, Station L
Toronto, Ontario
M6E 4Z2

Children's Book Centre
229 College Street
Toronto, Ontario
M5T 1R4

The League of Canadian Poets
24 Ryerson Avenue
Toronto, Ontario
M5T 2P3

The Writers' Union of Canada
24 Ryerson Avenue
Toronto, Ontario
M5T 2P3

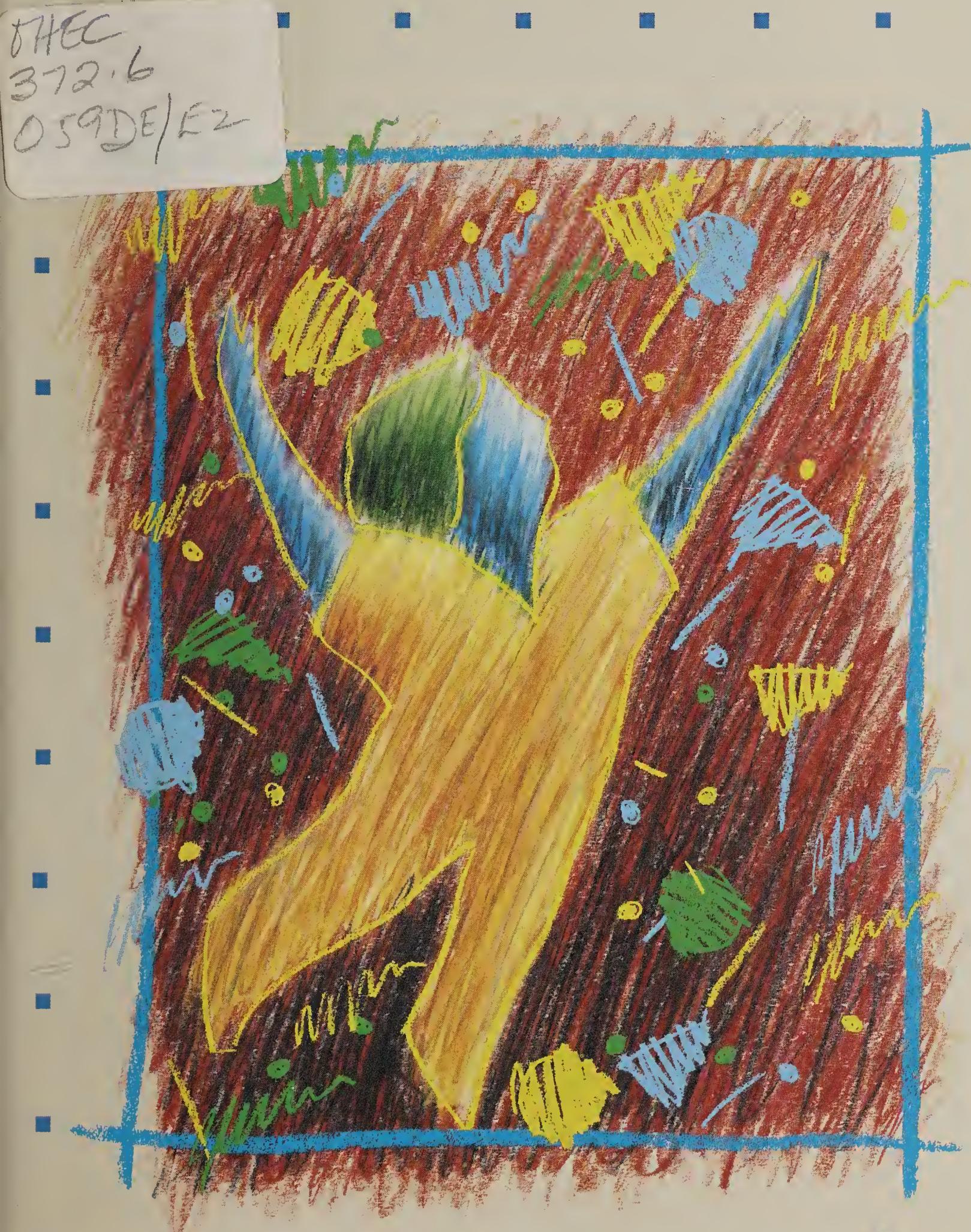


Ministry
of
Education

Chris Ward, Minister
Bernard J. Shapiro, Deputy Minister

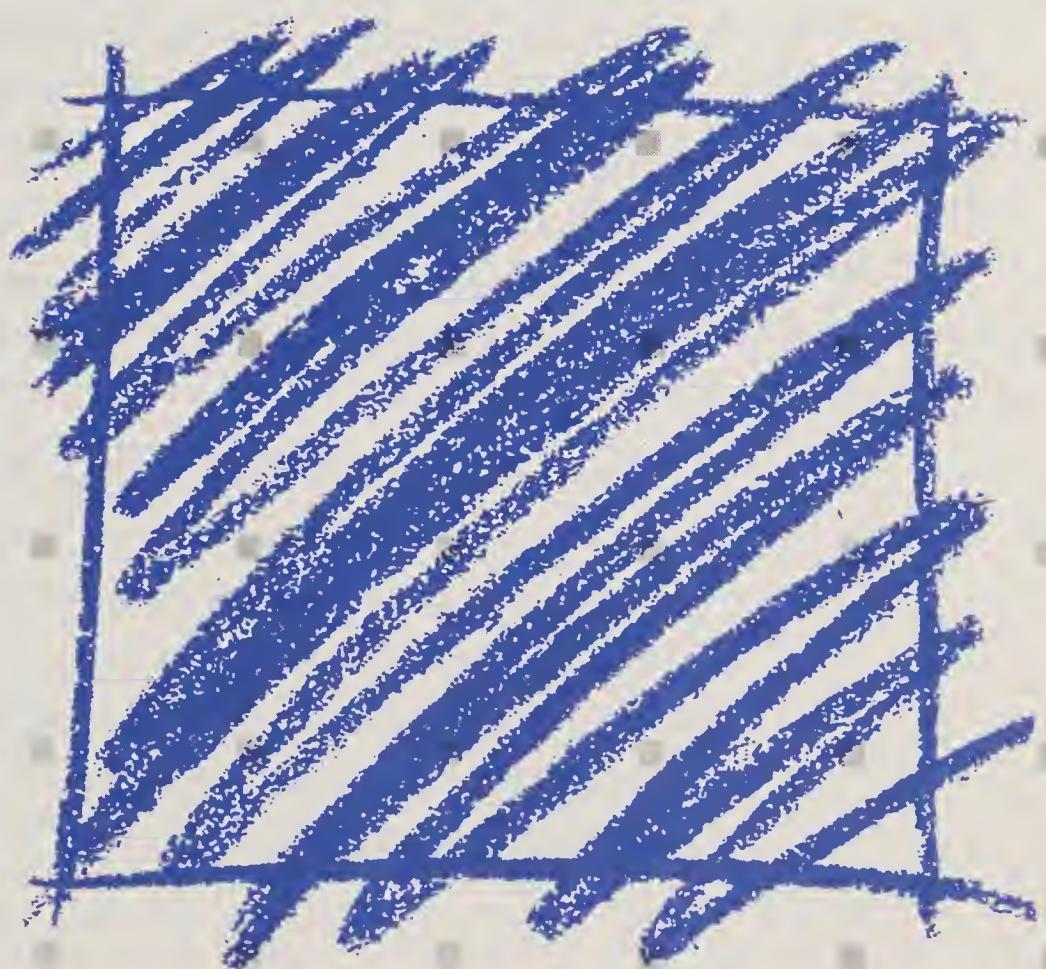
Growing With Books

Book 3: About Poetry



Prologue:

What About Poetry?



Prologue: What About Poetry?

Lissa Paul

Budding writers at creative-writing schools play a guessing-game called “Smoke”. A person who is “it” thinks of someone famous. The others in the group have to guess who that character is. One initial clue is allowed. So the person who is it, thinking of Superman, for example, would say only “I am a fictional male.”

To discover the identity of Superman (to continue the example), the people in the group have to ask the person who is “it” a series of questions that are put in the following form: “What kind of ----- are you?” The first Superman question might be, say, “What kind of animal are you?” The person who is “it” then has to respond with what kind of animal Superman would be if he were an animal (not what kind of animal Superman would like as a pet). Would Superman be a tiger? A panther? A lion? He certainly wouldn’t be a rat or a rabbit!

The group continues to ask questions such as: “What kind of car are you?” “What weather?” “What flower?” “What building?” The possible variations provide wonderful “scope for the imagination” as Anne (of Green Gables) might say. Eventually, through collective, unconscious associations, the “smoke” clears and the identity of the character emerges.

Such a metaphor-in-action game is one dramatic way of illustrating just how powerful an image can be. And it is a demonstration of Archibald MacLeish’s description of a poem: “A poem should not mean / But be.”¹

“Smoke” is the sort of game Diane Dawber might play in her classroom. Her personal, practical article “Poem As Car” is about reading and writing poetry as an everyday part of classroom life, not as an abstract and erudite part. Dawber does not, however, relegate poetry to the low-life sphere of doggerel, pop songs, or mnemonic. Poetry has a place in both high art and low art. As a teacher it is possible for you to make both visible to your students.

1. Archibald MacLeish, “Ars Poetica”, *Collected Poems 1917-52* (Cambridge, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1952), pp. 40-41.

When teaching poetry, listen to the children in your class. Diane Dawber does. She noticed that her students were intimately familiar with dragsters, and she made them just as familiar with poems.

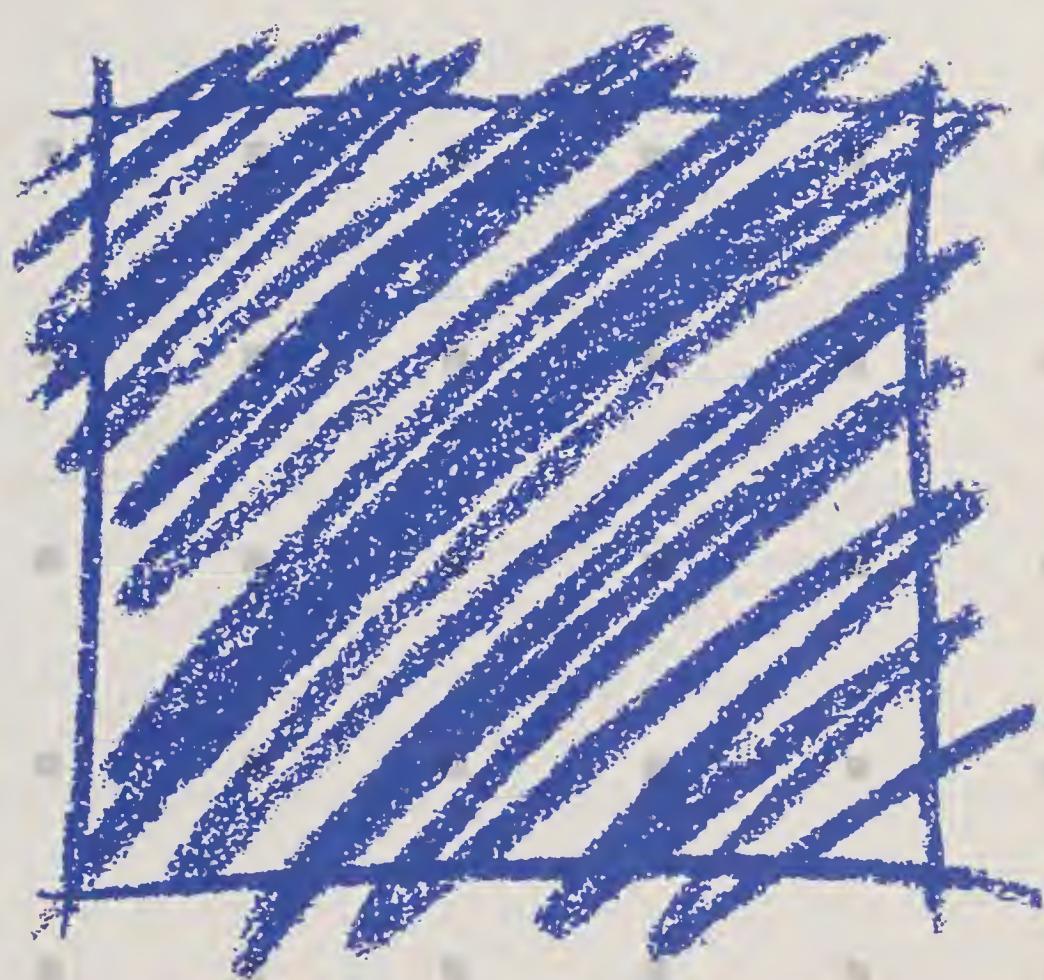
Familiarity with the language of poetry comes with practice, and with exposure to a wide range of poems. It does not come from pointless drills on the differences between metaphors and similes, or other such boring attempts to hammer malleable poems into fixed holes. Teachers do not have to explain poems; in fact, it is preferable not to. To quote MacLeish again: “A poem should be equal to:/ Not true.”²

Poetry is made up of an infinitely complex (and ultimately undefinable) constellation of sensual and visceral elements: intensely visible colours and shapes; textures you can feel; sounds with a whole orchestra full of undertones; scents that come from gardens, garbage dumps, and all kinds of places in between; and tastes somehow more exotic than ordinary ones. Poets keep trying to put their experience of the world into words. And, as readers, we keep trying to turn those words back into a revised, refreshed view of the world. That is, we keep trying to read the words well enough so that we experience the world anew.

The “meaning-of-the-poem” comes out of a vibrant resonance set up between the poem’s words and the world. Responding, physically, to the powerfully charged world of poetry is something that teaches humanity more eloquently than any other form of human discourse. The pleasure of the poem comes from exploration not explanation; from the creation in the reader of a living organism that grows.

2. Ibid.

Inside Poetry



Inside Poetry

Lissa Paul

Half-way through the poem, Toby began to cry. She had been reading aloud as part of her seminar presentation in my fourth-year undergraduate children's literature class. We were all caught off guard by the intensity of her response. I have to confess that I've forgotten the poem, but I remember the moment; and I remember why the poem touched her (and us) so profoundly.

Toby had spoken to me a few days earlier about what she was going to do in her presentation. She wanted to talk about the way creativity is "civilized" out of children (she had been working with a child in whom she saw instinctive joy repressed), and she wanted to cite a poem she remembered, in a shadowy way, from her own schooldays. She knew the poem had something to do with the colour yellow and with why yellow was still her favourite colour. But she couldn't remember the poem or the author. So she called her mother long-distance to explain the situation and see if her mother could locate the book in which Toby knew the poem to be.

Toby's mother had been unaware that the poem was so important to her daughter. When she found it, the clues to its significance came to light. Her mother had once said that Toby's nursery-school paintings had always been instantly recognizable – they were exuberant, bold, and filled with sunlight – but that after Toby started school her drawings lost their individual vitality and became of a piece with those of the other children. Her mother could no longer recognize them.

Toby's creativity had been "civilized" out of her. And the enormity of the loss was revealed to Toby through the poem – in a way so immediate and so powerful that it touched us all. For that moment we were all at one with her.

I've been thinking about Toby and what happened that day in class, as I've been trying to write this article on poetry. And I've been thinking

about basic questions about the value of poetry. Questions like “Why read poetry?”, “Why write it?”, or “Why study it?” – questions that, on the face of it, look naïve or silly, especially in a book about children’s literature.

I know why I read poetry. The language of poetry often creates for me a kind of magical explosion and sets off a range of responses: joy and wonder, fear and pain – and many things in between. Poetry is very much part of my sense of what it is to be human and to share in a community of emotional response. But how is it possible to communicate that sense to anyone else? Toby’s story, I hope, gives at least a glimpse of the power of poetry to touch our most hidden and forgotten places, our human places. That’s why I’ve decided to focus this article on the human truth in poetry.

What follows is something like my journey into the landscape of poetry. Ted Hughes, poet laureate, is the guide, partly because he has had the most profound effect on my response to imaginative literature, and partly because one of his books, *Poetry in the Making*,¹ is, to my mind, one of the most attractive, readable, practical books available on reading and writing poetry. Originally prepared and read by Hughes for a series of BBC radio broadcasts for schools, the text retains the oral quality of the original – the living voice of a practising poet, talking seriously and without condescension about what he does and why.

Poems, says Hughes, “have their own life, like animals. . . . And they have a certain wisdom. They know something special . . . something perhaps which we are very curious to learn.” That is how he begins *Poetry in the Making*. And when he talks about making a poem come to life, he uses no thorny technical or theoretical language. He says simply that

1. Ted Hughes, *Poetry in the Making* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969). Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

poems are “an assembly of living parts moved by a single spirit. The living parts are the words, the images, the rhythms. The spirit is the life which inhabits them when they all work together.” That’s all. Then he explains how to do that:

Words that live are those which we hear, like “click” or “chuckle”, or which we see, like “freckled” or “veined”, or which we taste, like “vinegar” or “sugar”, or touch, like “prickle” or “oily”, or smell, like “tar” or “onion”. Words which belong directly to one of the five senses. Or words which act and seem to use their muscles, like “flick” or “balance”.²

When Ted Hughes tells it, it sounds easy enough. Just “imagine what you are writing about. See it and live it . . . Just look at it, touch it, smell it, listen to it, turn yourself into it . . . You keep your eyes, your ears, your nose, your taste, your touch, your whole being on the thing you are turning into words”.³ The problem is that most of us can’t keep up that kind of concentration. Besides, we’re usually so repressed that we opt for the familiar and the conventional responses, right answers instead of true ones.

But children and real poets have an advantage. Their responses to the world are less conditioned – more fluid – than our grown-up ones usually are. When you are talking about poetry with children, or when you write it with them, the trick is to open up, not close down, possible ways of experiencing the world. And that is one of the things poetry is – it is about looking at the world around us, experiencing it so clearly and acutely that we connect it instantly with emotional response, then look out again at the world with new eyes.

Ted Hughes often does that – makes things that I don’t really see come to life in unexpected ways. In his most recent book for children,

2. Ibid., p. 17.

3. Ibid., p. 18.

What Is the Truth?: A Farmyard Fable for the Young, the rightness of his vision often catches me with an unexpected sense of shock. Here is Hughes on cows:

I think

There's a summer ocean liner in cows –
Majestic and far off,
With a quiet mysterious delight,
Fading through the blue afternoon.

And there's a ruined holy city
In a herd of lying down, cud-chewing cows –
Noses raised, eyes nearly closed
They are fragments of temples – even their outlines
Still at an angle unearthly.⁴

It would never occur to me to see cows as ocean liners, or as “a ruined holy city”. But Hughes identifies – sees – something in cows that was not visible to me until he brought it to my attention. I'll think of these lines the next time I see cows – and think about cows with more respect, too. I'll see something beyond the random marks in a field, glanced at and forgotten as I go tearing down Highway 401.

How to put that knowledge into the classroom? Reading first. The chances are that if you choose a poem with the sensual qualities Hughes talks about – a poem that can be seen, touched, tasted, smelled and/or heard – it will be a poem the children can accommodate.

Now writing. Poetry is about making – in fact that is the original meaning of the word, so the title and subject matter of Hughes's book are particularly apt.

Hughes suggests you choose an object or an animal or anything else that is of interest to you and your class. Have the students first focus on it, then write about it as quickly and spontaneously as they can. Set a time limit (Hughes recommends ten minutes). The only rule is that each fresh thought gets a new line. In my own experience, it is a good idea for the

4. Ted Hughes, *What Is the Truth?: A Farmyard Fable for the Young* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), unpage. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

teacher to write with the students, under the same conditions. Share your work with them as they share theirs with you. Don't be surprised if they write better poetry – more visceral, less conditioned, less artificial, and less self-conscious – than you do.

One of my own undergraduate students who tried this technique with her Grade 3 class recounted a lovely story about what the children taught her. They all wrote animal poems. Beverly (their teacher) confessed to the class when they had finished that she wasn't very happy with the beginning of her poem, that she had tried to restart it several times to get it right, but that it didn't seem to get any better. The students sympathized. Then they explained that when they had the same problem, they just brought the animal they were trying to write about back into their minds and wrote from the picture. Beverly understood. The children got it right. While Beverly had been trying to write in an orderly fashion by getting the words to arrange themselves correctly, the children simply went back to the source and made the picture speak. A good lesson – for poets and teachers and children.

The children in Beverly's class taught her about looking beyond words to the thing itself. That has a lot to do with addressing the question of what poetry is. In a (spring 1984) letter to me, Hughes says that poetry "is simply the name we give to a certain kind of writing. The closer that kind of writing gets to a total (instantaneous) release – something that satisfies & reinforces & appeases the whole organism – the more intense, as poetry, it seems to be." He is talking about poetry in absolutely physical terms: words that change the way we experience the world. In an interview, Hughes says that a line from a poem by John Crowe Ransom – "Tawny are the leaves turned but they still hold" – made his "hair stand on end" when he first read it.⁵

Other poets share Hughes's sense of the power of poetry to disturb us physically. Here is Emily Dickinson: "If I read a book and it makes my

5. Ekbert Faas, *Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Black Sparrow Press, 1980), p. 211.

whole body so cold no fire can ever warm me, I know that it is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that it is poetry.”⁶

For these poets, then, words make experience resonate emotionally, internally. About *Poetry in the Making*, Hughes says (again in the letter previously quoted) that he wanted “to direct readers (listeners) towards certain faculties – inner concentration, inner listening. A deliberate sort of self-exposure to an event – an inner event”.

If this description of poetry sounds more like magic than language arts, there is good reason. In other times, in other places, poets were magical people, the life-blood of the community. Shamans and medicine men knew the “secret names”, the “true names” of things and people, and possessed power over them. Medieval heroic poets were the keepers of all the social codes and genealogies of the community. Sufi poets were believed to cure the sick by finding the right stories to speak to the patient’s illness. Words had, and to some extent, even in our society, still have, the power to charm, to cast spells. Even though poetry isn’t as essential to our high-tech mind-sets as in the past, traces of its power linger. Just listen to children in a playground promising to keep a secret. They use poetry, and they respect the power of words – even if they don’t exactly believe in it.

Now, despite the rather mystical tone of this discussion, I’m not abandoning the need to know about (the often ancient and ritualistic) formal structures. I’m saying that a skilled poet knows how to use them to make his words live. And a skilled reader who knows how to see and understand those structures knows why the poem is alive. There is power in knowledge. For instance, in Dylan Thomas’s “Do not go gentle into that good night”, the refrain lines ring with taut rage throughout the poem – as if trapped, ringing against the bars of a cage. Thomas makes you feel that rage by setting the poem as a villanelle, and letting the

6. E. Dickinson, cited in C. Hugh Holman, *A Handbook to Literature*, 3rd ed. (New York: Odyssey Press, 1972), s.v. “poetry”.

refrain lines themselves say and shape the felt rage. The first set of refrain lines – “Do not go gentle into that good night” (lines 1, 6, 12, and 18) ricochets off the second set – “Rage, rage against the dying of the light” (lines 3, 9, 15, and 19). And this all happens in the tight compass of the nineteen-line poem.⁷

In the same way, a poem that begins, “There was an old person of Dean / Who dined on one pea, and one bean”, makes it reasonably clear that the rest of the poem is going to be funny. You actually know, because you recognize the rhythm and rhyme scheme of the poem as the kind used in nonsense verse, that it will probably be nonsense: a limerick. In this case the poem is by that master of nonsense, Edward Lear, and it concludes, impenetrably enough: “For he said, ‘More than that / Would make me too fat,’ / That cautious old person of Dean.”⁸

Structures and shapes can convey something of the meaning and feeling in poems, and discussions about structure don’t have to be boring and disconnected from sense. Neither do other formal aspects of poetry. Like metaphors. As Hughes says about metaphor in *Poetry in the Making*:

A comparison is like a little puzzle. . . . You are forced to look more closely, and to think, and make distinctions, and be surprised at what you find – and all this adds to the strength and vividness of your final impression. And it all happens in a flash.⁹

A metaphor forces the imagination (of both the reader and the writer) into action, compels it to make connections between things – as, for example, when Hughes makes his readers think about the cows as “ocean liners” and “temples”.

7. D. Thomas, “Do not go gentle into that good night”, in *The Rattle Bag*, edited by T. Hughes and S. Heaney (London: Faber and Faber, 1982), pp. 131-32.

8. E. Lear, “There was an old person of Dean”, in *Oxford Book of Poetry for Children*, compiled by E. Blishen (New York: Peter Bedrick Books, 1984), p. 11.

9. T. Hughes, *Poetry in the Making*, p. 44.

To write and to read poetry is to engage actively in the exploration of our common humanity. To do that the writer focuses on the world in which he or she lives and trusts that the right words will surface. In his letter to me Hughes says that in *Poetry in the Making* he was not saying “study writing”, but ‘practise writing’, as diving to depths has to be practised. The whole business is closer to athletics than aesthetics, perhaps. A poem is alive if all the senses of writer and reader are alert.

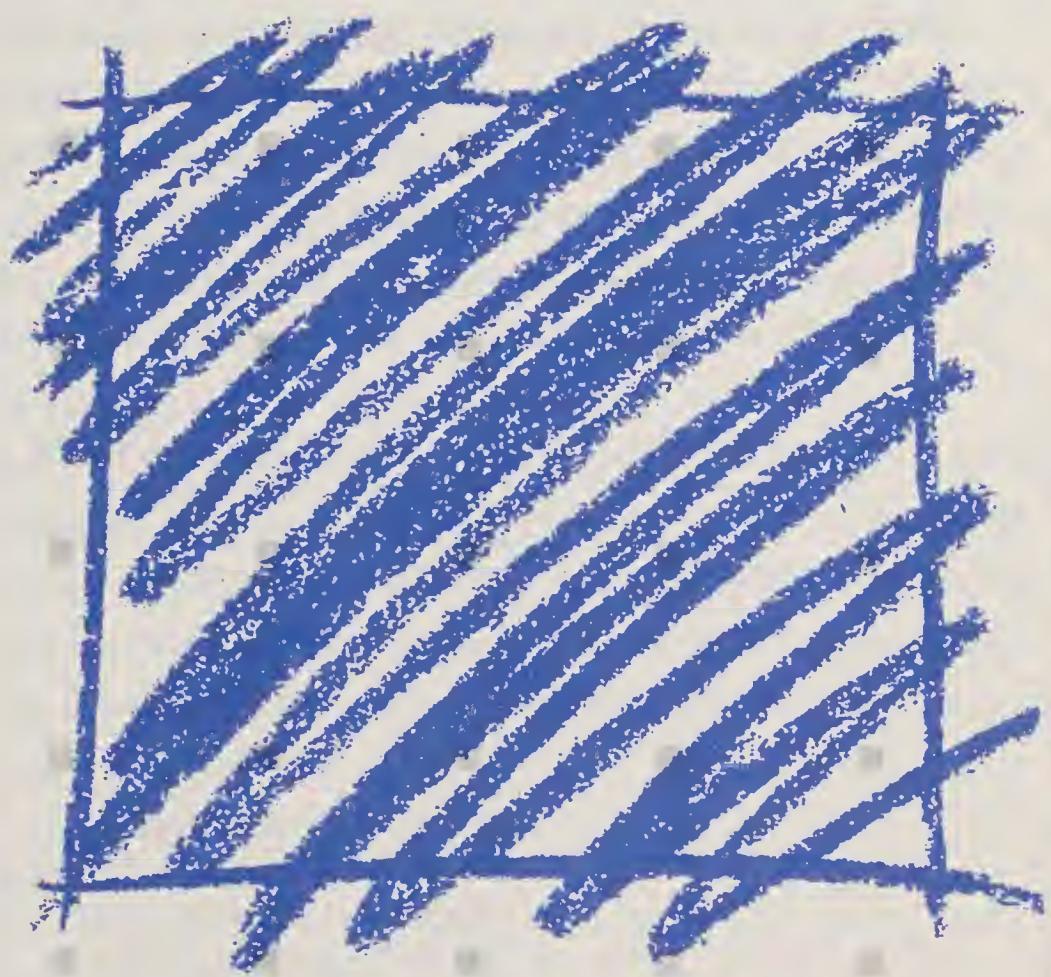
Why should we expose children to poetry, or to any form of imaginative literature? Hughes says that poetry is a way that man struggles “to possess his own experience, in other words to regain his genuine self”. Words are the way we do that.

Words that will express something of the deep complexity that makes us precisely the way we are, from the momentary effect of the barometer to the force that created men distinct from trees. Something of the inaudible music that moves us along in our bodies from moment to moment like water in a river. Something of the spirit of the snowflake in the water of the river. Something of the duplicity and the relativity and the merely fleeting quality of all this. Something of the almighty importance of it and something of the utter meaninglessness. And when words can manage something of this, and manage it in a moment of time, and in that same moment make out of it all the vital signature of a human being – not of an atom, or of a geometrical diagram, or of a heap of lenses – but a human being, we call it poetry.¹⁰

That’s what poetry is – for me anyway, today.

10. T. Hughes, *Poetry in the Making*, p. 124.

Poem As Car



Poem As Car

Diane Dawber

Danny looked up from his drawing as I passed. He smiled. I smiled back and stopped to admire the fantastic dragster in his picture. If only Danny could feel as comfortable with poems as he could with dragsters!

As I went on to other students, an idea, well, really just a phrase, began to repeat in my head. "Poem as car, poem as car...." It wouldn't go away.

It usually pays to examine the images that come to us at odd moments. So I did. Poem as car? Hmm. If poems were as familiar as lunchtime traffic, as exciting as a Grand Prix race, and at least as understandable as the internal combustion engine, then maybe Danny would be writing dragster poems to go with his dragster pictures.

Why do children draw cars? Perhaps because cars are so familiar and so associated with what adults do. I set out to make poems as familiar as the automobile, at least as far as I was able.

The first thing you will see upon entering my classroom, or even before you get there, are displays of poems. Walls, bulletin boards, chart stands, windows, and cupboard doors may all have poems attached to them. If it's Hallowe'en there may be spooky or pumpkin poems. If someone has lost a tooth or a friend, there may be lost tooth or friend poems. If it's the first bright day of spring, there are poems about that, too. Are you studying simple machines? No problem:

There once was a large scary bully
Who made everyone's muscles feel woolly.
A small lad with a rope
Showed that he was no dope
As he hauled up the brute with a pulley.

Long division?

Oh pity the poor dividend
Attacked by divisors who rend.
When he's cut up in pieces
The division then ceases
And the quotient numbers stretchers do send.

Poems help us out. They may not be great poems, only verses with catchy rhymes or silly images, but they're there to see. Simple machines and long division have never seemed the same.

Sometimes you can find posters with a poem appropriate to your need; or a calendar that has a poem with matching illustrations. If not, it doesn't take much effort to copy a poem onto chart paper and pull out a picture from your file to go with it. Of course, if you have calligraphic or artistic talents, so much the better. I am no artist, but my students enjoyed the simple magic-marker cartoons I made to accompany the limericks quoted above.

If you're pressed for time – and what teacher isn't? – before long your students will be wanting to take copying and illustrating jobs from you. All you will have to do is referee turns and keep materials on hand.

If you and your students are going to find suitable poems, it is necessary to have lots of sources on hand. Keep anthologies of work by many different writers or by single authors on your shelf of books for silent reading. Songbooks, sheet music, and hymnbooks are other possible sources. Or keep a collection of albums with the words to the songs by the record player. Old greeting cards and cutouts of advertisements provide verses, whatever we think of their literary quality and the commercial degradation of art. What we are trying to show is that poetry crops up in many places in the world, not just in school, not just in literature class.

The sneaky part comes next. It's great to have poetry displayed in your own classroom, but that still doesn't prove that poetry is acceptable in the whole wide world outside of school. What we have to do is spread it around. We once sent a poem to the principal about the standardized tests we had just finished. It had a lot in it about seeing dots before our eyes. He put it up in his office.

We sent a poem to the secretary about the downpour on the first day of school that happened right at lunchtime dismissal and caused traffic jams. She hung hers up too.

The chiropractor who visited to tell us about bones and muscles now has one of our poems in his waiting room. So does the store on the Tyendinaga Reserve where we went to spend the day.

The visiting percussion group who came to perform went away with a poem about their drums. Another teacher who let us go on a hike in his woods has a poem about some very strange and mysterious creatures we just might have met there. We might have to send a poem to the class in Africa who are going to be our pen pals. If only we had thought to send one to Marc Garneau, our poetry could have gone into orbit.

Poems to look at are only so involving. Like the car in the auto museum or dealer's showroom, there is only so much you can learn by looking. To learn more you have to test-drive it.

There are disagreements about the models that should be test-driven. All I can say is that I would not expect new drivers to take out the most valuable antiques in the museum or the most expensive racing cars available. They might get home safely; then again, they might not. I would go for a good, reliable, easy-to-handle, relatively inexpensive model. It won't go too fast for the driver's experience, there aren't a lot of gadgets to worry about, and a small bump or scratch is not going to be the end of the world. The new drivers should be aware of the museum and racing varieties – and probably are; but there's no need to pile on the pressure when steering and going sixty kilometres an hour are plenty thrill enough.

Poems written for children within the last ten years should probably be relevant, and if the anthology is for children one would hope that the selection is sound. Read it yourself. If you don't understand the poems, chances are that many of your young people won't either.

Analogies are never exact but thinking of the poem as car puts the debate about giving classics to novices in a reasonable light. All sorts of poetry should be made available, but I don't expect students to really understand or enjoy the classics without having had much experience with simpler models first.

There are many ways to test-drive a poem. I have recited a favourite poem to the class or read it to them. The presentation may be casual or complete with props and costumes. The students have brought in poems, sometimes memorized, sometimes read, to present at sharing time, on special occasions, or just before recess. Invite a poet, songwriter, or advertising writer to visit and read or recite favourite or original works to the class. If that is not possible, the listening centre may contain tapes of poetry being read. There are many excellent tapes and records available. Or make tapes of yourself or your students reading a favourite, prepared poem. There are endless possibilities.

Another way of involving students in poetry is to let them manage the displays or centres in the room. Many students are studying calligraphy these days, and what better way to use their talents than by having them copy poems for all of us to enjoy? This is a good chance for illustration too.

Once students are encouraged to find appropriate poems, they will come up with many treasures. You will be surprised to find how many have a parent, aunt, uncle, or cousin who writes and has published poetry. You will also be surprised to find how many families have favourite poems that have been shared for generations.

Up until now I have skirted the subject of writing poetry. Writing poetry is a lot like building and repairing cars. It scares some people to death. There are many brave souls who aren't afraid, but that is no help to those who are. But writing is important. To really know poetry one must get into the mechanics of it.

Think of it this way. Are there many children who are afraid to build a soapbox car? Not on your life! It doesn't even have to have wheels to let the child have hours of fun whizzing down imaginary roads.

Writing poetry is a lot like that. You don't have to come up with a masterpiece on your first attempt. Working with computers has taught us that it is not a disaster to make a mistake. One just has to go back and try to correct or debug the program. The same is true of poetry. Poets would be petrified with fright if they thought that the next words written down would be famous for generations. A poet writes and writes and out of it all may come a few lines worth keeping for posterity, maybe not. The point is to do it or there is no chance at all.

Students can learn a lot just by watching you try. Take the chalk and work on a limerick or a funny couplet about something that has just happened. The others can be doing some reading or their own writing. If you feel reasonably comfortable about doing so, let them ask questions or make suggestions. Use the overhead projector one day, chart paper the next. Get the group to compose a thank-you verse for a visitor. Donald Graves, in *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work*,¹ includes many suggestions with examples about ways these things can be done. There is no one right way, just lots of good possibilities.

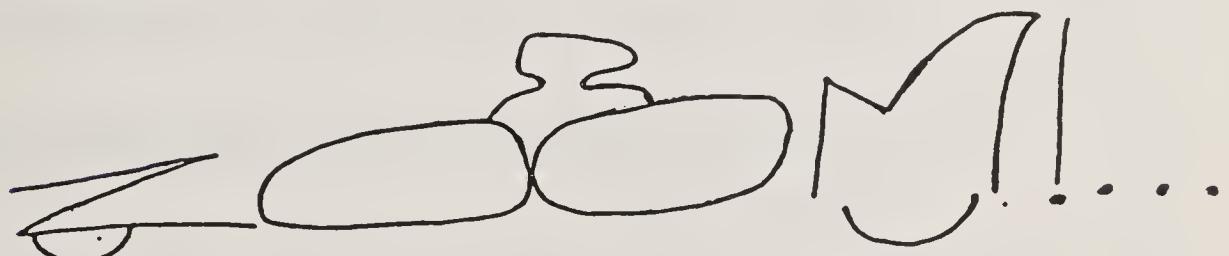
You may have concerns about how you should talk about poems. Some teachers teach all the sophisticated vocabulary from trochaic trimeter to metonymy, while others teach none. In my view, the best solution lies somewhere in between. Some of us can just about manage to ask for the gas tank to be filled, the oil checked, and the windshield cleaned; others are fluent about compression ratios and torque conversions. Some of us can talk about poetry only in simple terms; others are at home with a more complicated vocabulary. Most of us can talk about the image and the rhythm and the connections to life that we see in a poem,

1. Donald Graves, *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work* (London: Heinemann, 1981).

but few will go on to a technical discussion of the language and meaning constructions. In any poem it is a great deal to talk about the picture, the sound, and the relation of the poem to our own experience. Sometimes when you are writing a poem it becomes necessary to identify what is producing the effect or blocking it and more technical terms may be required. The mechanic needs to know about the tie rod ends, but the driver may only need to know that the steering seems off.

The most fun I have had from thinking of the poem as car is thinking of the models that some of my favourite poets might write. Can you think of Al Purdy in a "'57 Chev" of a poem? Or Dennis Lee in a bright yellow Volkswagen from which innumerable clowns emerge? Or Margaret Atwood in an air-conditioned compact? T. S. Eliot is surely a well-used Bentley. The possibilities are as endless as the imaginations of children and teachers and poets.

The supreme success, as far as I am concerned, is this dragster poem:



by Danny

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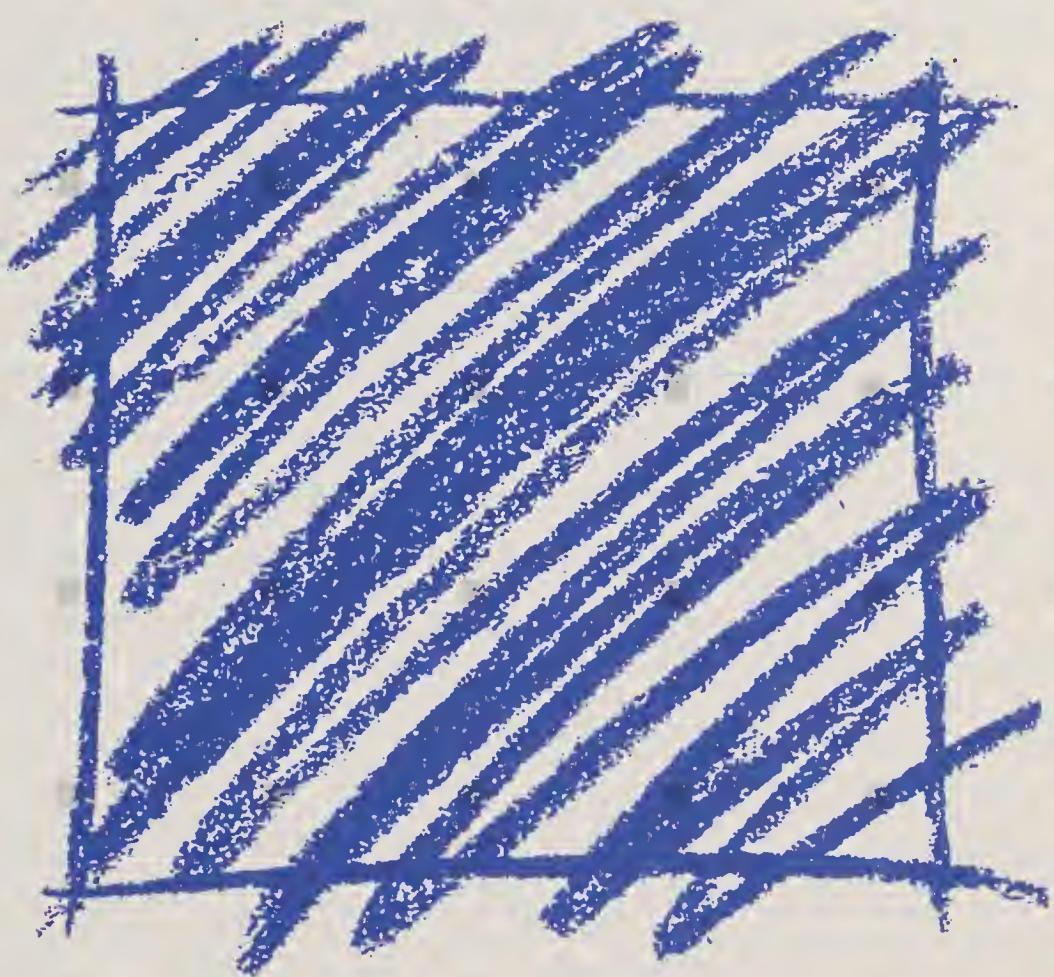
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Epilogue:

Poetry As Something You Want

to Do, Not Something You Have to Do





Epilogue: Poetry As Something You Want to Do, Not Something You Have to Do

Lissa Paul

Because the articles in this section offer many practical ways of putting poetry into classrooms, only their basic tenets need restatement here. Begin by making poetry a part of life – your life, the life of the classroom, everyday life. Be aware that poetry belongs to both high culture and popular culture.

Have the children in your class bring in poems they like. Buy books of poetry, borrow them from the library, and subscribe to, or at least read, a journal that publishes poetry. (There are lots of suitable small Canadian literary magazines: *Canadian Literature*, *Open Letter*, *Poetry Toronto*, *Canadian Forum*, for example. Libraries and some bookstores carry them. Or try the Canadian Periodical Association for further information.) Read poetry and be seen to read poetry. Encourage the children in your class to bring in poems that please them. Bring in poems you like; poems you want to share. Be able to acknowledge puzzlement. If you don't understand something, say so. The children in your class might be able to help.

On the assumption that you and your students are comfortable enough to talk about poetry, you ought to write it as well as read it. In struggling with the problems of composition readers are put in touch with writers. This brings us back to the importance of revision. Finding the right words/images/rhythms/metaphors/verse forms is important. Encourage your students to revise their work, but be sensitive to the fact that you are supposed to be nurturing writers – not stunting their growth. Focus on success rather than failure. The process has something in common with growing a good lawn. By encouraging the grass you can crowd out the crabgrass and the weeds.

Words are important. They have histories, geographies, ancestries, rhythms, and tonalities. Treat them with respect. Children are not frightened or put off by words they don't know. As teachers, we can help students learn to delight in new words, to enjoy their taste, to feel triumphant in their possession.

In-class exercises ought to take the meanings of words into account. But words also have aural and visual qualities. To explore the aural qualities, try sound poetry. In-class projects could range from single-sound chants (for example, the mantra "om") to whole stories told in a language the children make up themselves. How would a primitive person – someone without formal spoken or written language – convey a complex set of ideas or instructions to a group? For example, how would you tell a group of hunters that there is a giant mammoth lurking in the woods? And that if they sneak up behind it and throw a spear at its heart they can eat mammoth steaks for dinner?

Ask questions: What do sounds look like? What does a landscape sound like? You might consider playing a recording of sound poets. The Four Horsemen are a Canadian group with a number of records to their credit.¹ Or you might try to find a recording of Inuit throat singers.

Now to poems as pictures. Meanings of poems come from their shapes as well as their sounds. To focus on shape, look at concrete poems. Poets are very conscious of the physical dimensions of words – bp nichol, for instance, often plays out a single word in a variety of

1. For example, The Four Horsemen, *Canadada*. Griffin House, 88760 036 0.

shapes and sizes. Or you and your students might try to make sense of this concrete poem by Earle Birney:

•
•
d d
e e
i e
d n
o b e s
m o
e t
s i
i u
d f o m o s q
T E
O B

a r c s f i n g
t e
c r
h s
e o
d f
t y b p o e t
h r
e y²

2. E. Birney, "First Aid", *The Cow Jumped Over the Moon* (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972), p. 102.

Metaphor can be approached in two ways. You can use the “smoke” approach, as outlined in the introduction to this section. Or you might ask some riddles. There are some good examples of riddle poems in the Puffin Collection of nursery rhymes. Riddles usually work on the same principle as metaphors – you have to be able to see two different things at once. They are rather like “smoke” in reverse: a series of metaphors gradually builds into a picture, as in the following riddle poem by John Cotton:

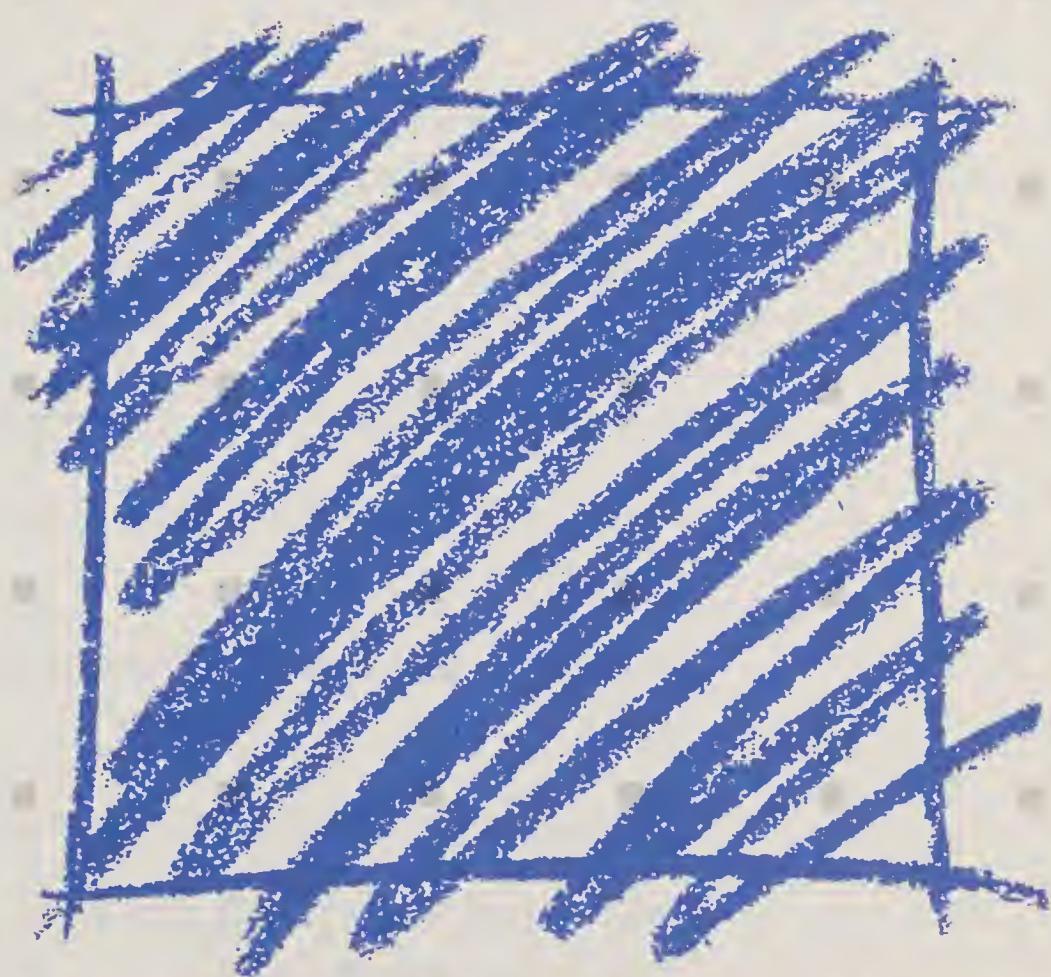
Insubstantial I can fill lives,
Cathedrals, worlds.
I can haunt islands,
Raise passions
Or calm the madness of kings.
I've even fed the affectionate.
I can't be touched or seen,
But I can be noted.³

The answer, in case you haven't guessed, is music. Your students can probably provide you with similar examples.

Reading and writing poetry can help students develop the same skills we have been stressing – attention to the words on the page, to what the author says and the reader sees, to the importance of detail, to the art and craft of selection, and to taking pride in something one makes. With skill, luck, effort, and goodwill it might just be possible to turn out a generation of poetry readers and writers.

3. John Cotton, “Totleigh Riddles”, in V. A. Fanthorpe, J. Cotton, and L. J. Anderson, *The Crystal Zoo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 7. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

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Growing With Books

Book 4: Reading, Talking, and Writing

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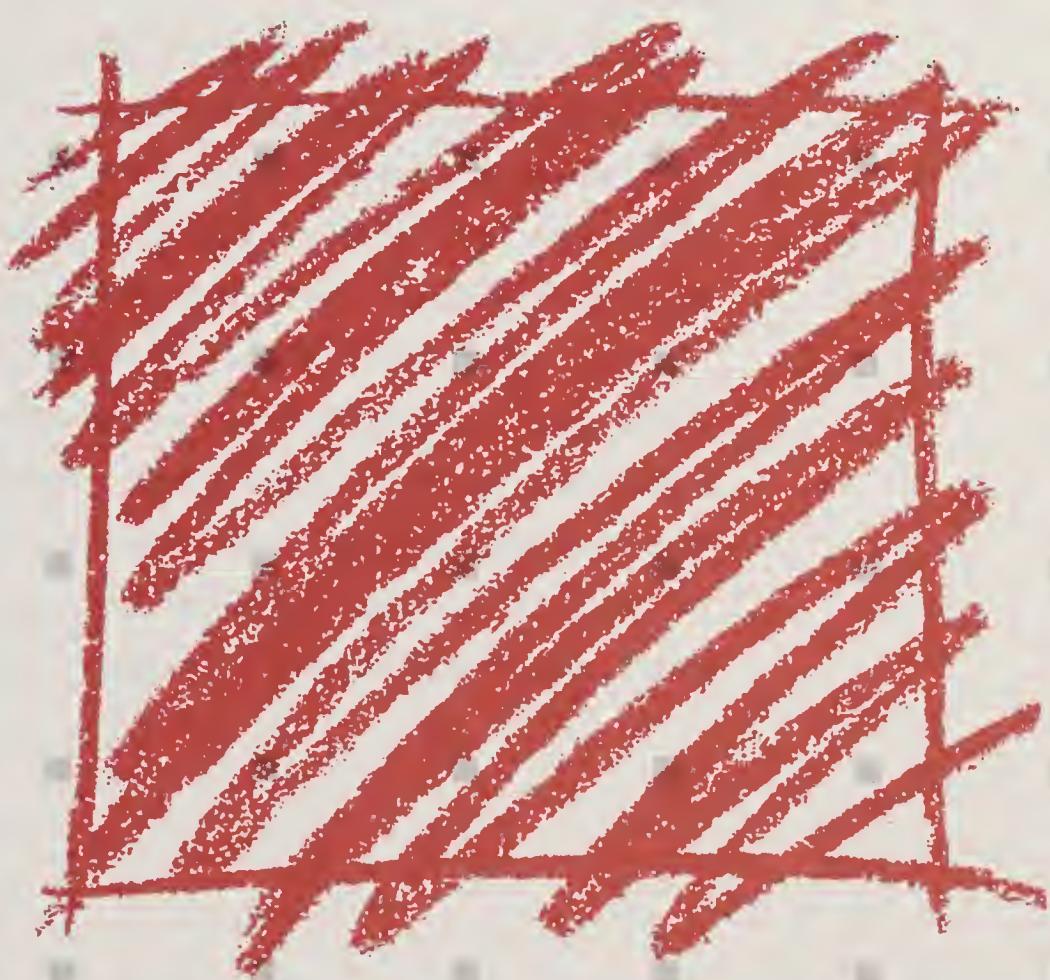


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Prologue:

How Story Readers Become Story Makers





Prologue: How Story Readers Become Story Makers

Lissa Paul

Two kinds of response go into the act of reading: an individual, human response and a response based on a sense of story. Individual human responses vary. Sex, age, social conditions, values, and needs – all have a bearing on what the reader will find important in a particular text. The response based on a sense of story comes out of the reader's experience as a reader – that is, out of his or her knowledge of stories and the conventions of literature. "Reader-response theory" is the new term buzzing around the esoteric hives of contemporary literary theory these days to describe this active kind of reading. This theory shifts the emphasis away from the "objective" meaning of the text and puts it, instead, on the nature of the relationships between text, reader, and author.

What does reader-response theory have to do with language arts? A lot. The implications of reader-response theory are important for the ways we think about stories and the ways in which we talk about them in the classroom. The articles in this section provide some clues on how to do that.

In "Storybook Reading and Literacy", Paul Shaw talks about the need to establish an appropriate context for approaching a story. He describes how a medieval society comes alive for a group of children when they are asked to imagine going back into that world and participating in it (as knights or farmers, for example).

The way a child finds his or her own place in a story is the subject of David Booth's article about story and drama. He demonstrates how John Burningham's *Would You Rather...* can be the source of a personal drama about the interactions between self and other.

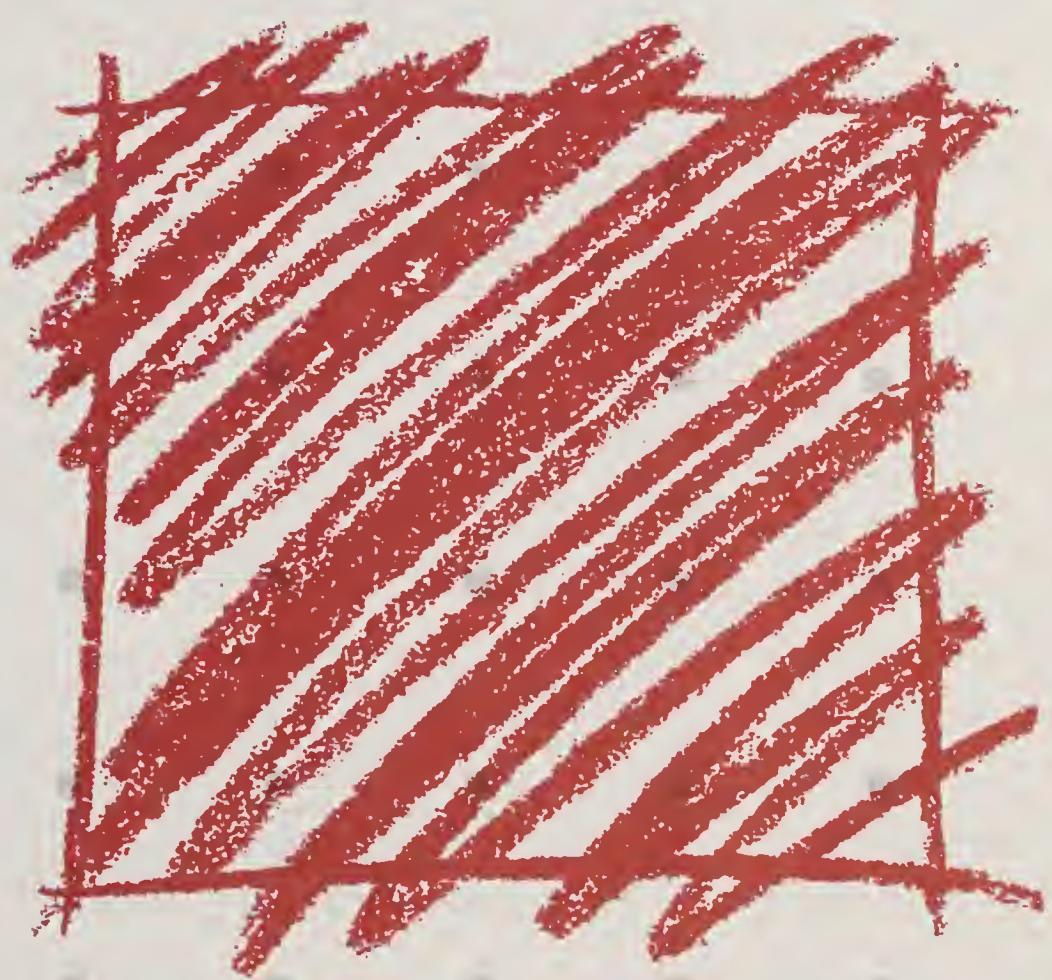
In the end, reader-response theory is simply a way of describing active relationships – conversations – between reader, author, and story.



Prologue: How Story Readers Become Story Makers

But the implications are profound. The theory calls into question the whole idea of what we mean by comprehension. “Right” answers become less certain. In fact, right questions become less certain. As a teacher, it is up to you to make your students conscious of the fact that they respond to stories actively both as individual human beings and as people who have inherited a legacy of stories.

Reading to Children





Reading to Children

Joan McGrath

The things adults do “for the children” are by no means always a pleasure in and of themselves. Reading aloud, however, is one of those rare, intrinsically rewarding activities. Sharing a book with a child (or children) allows an intimacy and communion all too rare in these noisy times. Even without the flowering hedge of “fringe benefits” that this activity offers, the pure pleasure of the experience would make reading aloud more than worth the expenditure of time and effort.

Reading aloud – to one’s family, one’s children, or anyone with whom it seemed pleasant and desirable to share a favourite story or verse – was a popular pastime not so very long ago; in a quieter time, to be sure. The honourable place of the storyteller or reader-aloud was usurped first by radio and the early “talkies”, then by television, and most recently by video; and that is a pity, for several reasons. Anyone interested enough in the subject can undoubtedly suggest many of the benefits of reading aloud for both reader and audience; but some aspects of this rather neglected subject bear reiteration, especially in the particular area of reading aloud to children.

Reading time should be a time for pleasure, for simultaneously stretching and relaxing the mind. Where television and video shrink the viewer’s ability to imagine or visualize, reading aloud puts demands on these underused faculties. Most children spend the greater part of their time in school fully occupied with the difficult though rewarding work of mastering a challenging curriculum. Learning to read is in itself a gigantic task. We adults, who have long since forgotten our own first stumbling attempts, no longer appreciate what an effort it all seems just at first.

Even those beginners fortunate enough to have appropriate, attractive, intrinsically enjoyable materials available, are at first so deeply engaged with the mere mechanics of reading that the experience is likely to be one of effort rather than of pleasure. The deciphering tasks they

face require deep concentration, to such an extent that young readers, while they may well decode all the words, quite miss the tune. They plod along and reach the goal, but they don't really have much chance to enjoy the trip.

That is where the reader-aloud comes into the picture. A reader who chooses the right sorts of varied and attractive materials keeps alive in the beginner's mind the hope and belief that soon he or she will be able to enjoy "real" books, rather than the repetitious controlled-vocabulary readers; books that even an adult can read with obvious pleasure. This brings us to an important – *the* important – point, about reading aloud. If you enjoy the experience and can communicate your own pleasure in it, the children will remember the reading with delight.

It is not difficult to communicate your personal pleasure in reading aloud. In fact, it should protect you from one of the minor agonies some good-hearted but mistaken persons undertake with the best of motives and the poorest of results: *don't* read aloud any piece of literature, at any level whatever, that you yourself do not find enjoyable. Since we live in a society wealthy beyond the dreams of literary avarice, it will be truly amazing if you cannot find something to read that you and your children can share with genuine pleasure.

Build a personal repertoire of such enjoyable stories, and add to it continually. You'll read a selection better every succeeding time, and if it is a well-chosen tale it will remain evergreen. It's a truism among librarians that you simply cannot sell a book that you yourself don't enjoy, however hard you work at it; maybe *because* you have to work at it. Somehow, try as you will, the true joy is lacking. Magically, the children instantly recognize this and greet your efforts with apathy or downright hostility. On the other hand, when you share a book you genuinely enjoy, the children sparkle along with you, begging for "just one more chapter", and demanding more books as good as that one; the applause rewards reading aloud in much the same way as a curtain call rewards a performance on stage.

Make no mistake, this is your chance to be better than a star. You get to play all the parts! You can be a ghost, a pirate, a swashbuckler, or a bear – no props or costumes are needed. But as with any performance, a rehearsal will be necessary if the performance is to be a polished one. It's a cardinal mistake to launch into unknown waters before an audience. Chances are you'll escape unscathed almost every time: but almost isn't good enough. Those who have attempted this foolhardy feat could share quite a few stories of embarrassing moments. The problems that arise may be simple ones of stumbling over unfamiliar names or uncommon words; mid-story is no time for a demonstration of dictionary skills. You may not find the proper cadence, or may fail to project the tones of surprise, fright, suppressed mirth, and so on, that may be crucial to achieving the desired effect. Worse, you may find that you have unwittingly embarked upon a story whose content will be embarrassing or offensive to you or to the audience. Don't make such a mistake "on stage"; try it out on the dog.

A good read-aloud need not be new, any more than it need be a veteran: good titles can be found in both categories. What it must do is read aloud well. Lots of good read-to-yourself titles are just that; somehow, when read aloud, they fail to fall pleasingly on the ear. Some have long, dull introductory chapters to which young listeners respond with impatience. (Remember, you don't have to read everything in any text. Good readers-aloud edit as they go, where necessary.) A mere handful of sure-fire read-alouds for juniors might include such favourites as *Underground to Canada*; *How to Eat Fried Worms*; *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*; *The Secret Garden*; *The Dog Who Wouldn't Be*; *Lassie Come Home*; *The Iron Man*; *How Tom Beat Captain Najork and His Hired Sportsmen*; *The Pinballs*; *The Great Gilly Hopkins*. Pick one you like and read it to yourself; if possible make a tape of yourself as reader, to monitor your own performance.

Choose materials that are appropriate to the age and interest levels of the children with whom you are dealing. And be sure to call upon the assistance of those best prepared, indeed most eager, to assist you in doing so: the teacher-librarians whose business it is to keep abreast of today's flood of new materials. A lot of wonderful new books are available – but so is a lot of dross. The classroom teacher quite simply has not got the time, and possibly not the expertise, to plough through great mounds of new titles in order to discover the best and eliminate what is inappropriate, while the teacher-librarian's job is to do just that.

Be wary about selecting your own cherished favourites without reconsidering them in light of the new function they are now to perform. Have they really stood the test of time? Do you remember the contents as well as you think you do? Just consider: part of what you loved about those well-loved stories had to do with the circumstances in which you first encountered them; also, you were a lot younger then, with unformed and uncritical tastes. Reread the “olde tyme” favourite to yourself. You may rediscover it with undiminished pleasure; or you may find that it espouses attitudes or uses language that are today considered offensive, or that a book you have advertised as a great treat is one you find no longer to your taste. Avoid having such dismaying revelations sprung on you in the middle of a reading-aloud session.

Don't ever call youngsters away from some pursuit in which their interests are fully engaged for their prescribed “reading time”. Even if it is to hear a story they'd ordinarily enjoy, they will certainly feel nothing but resentment if it interrupts a baseball game. Who wouldn't? Excellent times for reading are directly after a strenuous activity, at the completion of a project, or at the end of the day, when the youngsters are in a relaxed and receptive frame of mind, just as bedtime is the best reading-aloud time in the home.

It may be tempting to make read-aloud time merely an extension of the curriculum portion of the school day, but resist the temptation. Make reading time a looked-for treat, not just another treatment. Youngsters who have spent all day hard at work (and never forget just how hard that work is; according to most experts, learning to read is the most intellectually demanding effort most people undertake in their whole lives!) should not be faced with more of the same in what is supposed to be a pleasantly relaxing interlude. Leave the reading instruction and lectures on content subjects to instructional time. This is your chance to demonstrate why all the day-by-day slogging really is worthwhile.

This is your opportunity to provide living proof that you, yourself, are glad you learned to read because it can be such a source of pleasure. Always remember that some of the youngsters in any given class may have had little or no opportunity to observe any other significant adult in their lives reading just for the love of it. Almost everybody tells children they should read in order to enjoy books and to explore their riches; but few adults actually model this much-lauded behaviour. You can ensure that they see at least one adult practising what everyone preaches. All day you and your children have been busy seeing that they dealt faithfully with the meat and potatoes of education. Reading aloud is your chance to sit back, smile, and offer the dessert.

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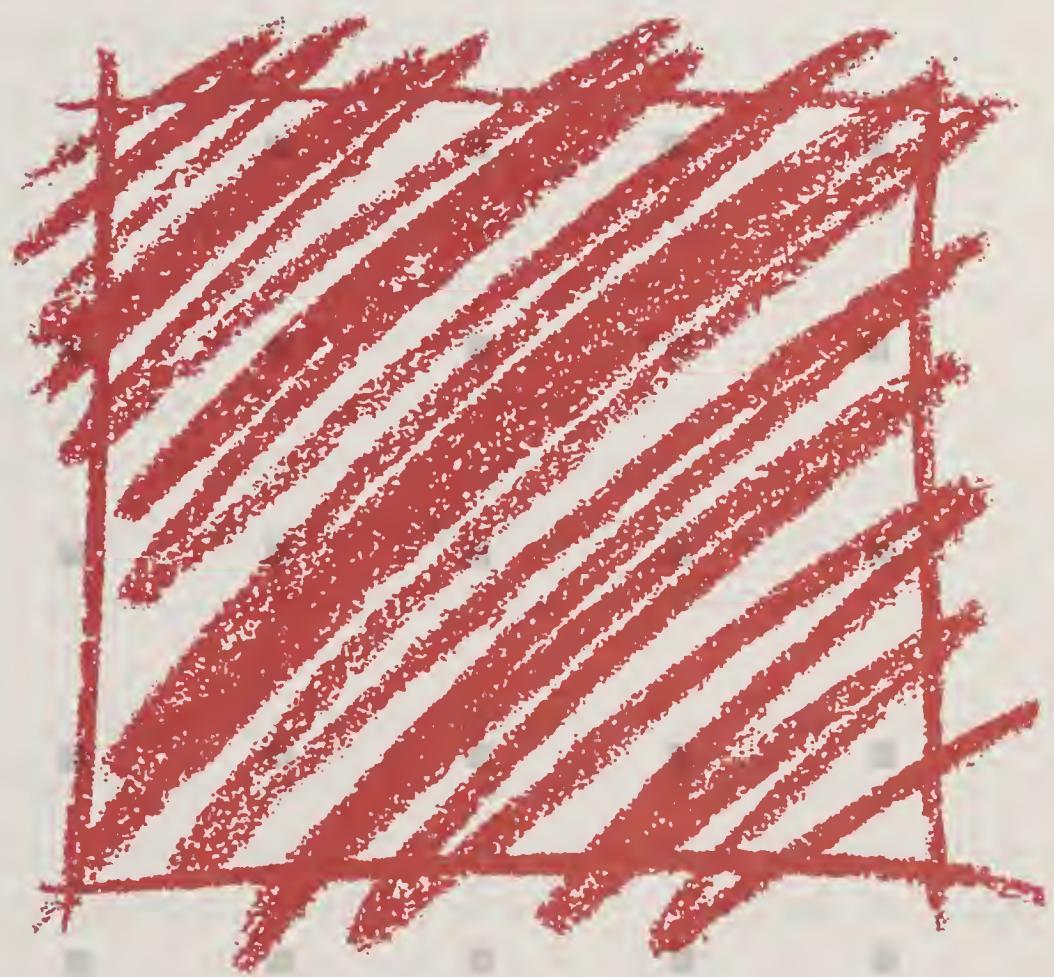
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Storybook Reading and Literacy:

Children's Responses to Stories





Storybook Reading and Literacy: Children's Responses to Stories¹

Paul Shaw

Children's facility with the forms and practices of literacy has a significant bearing on their development of language and cognitive skills at school. This facility is communicated to children (as described previously by Gordon Wells) through storybook reading rather than through talk. Children who have a knowledge of literacy practices have developed, through experience with literature, an appreciation for the patterns and structures of sustained written discourse. This sustained written language most often is introduced to young children as they listen to stories read to them by their parents. Storybook reading develops the child's sense of story and this sense of story – a macro structure, if you will – can help the child organize, make sense of, and come to know bodies of information, knowledge, and experience. Storybook reading also brings the child to written language in ways that, in part, are determined by the very characteristics of such language. These qualities or characteristics become apparent when one compares written and spoken language.

Written language differs from spoken language in that the meaning that is to be communicated lies entirely within the text itself. In conversation, the meanings that are exchanged arise out of the context of the current activity, the shared experience and knowledge of the past, as well as the option to question and clarify, as meaning is negotiated between the participants. In written discourse, however, particular attention must be paid to the language in stories and other written texts; in order to build up the structure of meaning, the reader must attend to the words and structures, for they are the sole keepers of the meaning of the text.

1. The author would like to thank the following teachers who so willingly taped stories being read in their classrooms and who provided the examples used herein: Margaret Simmons, Dundas Street School, Toronto; Larry Swartz, Nancy Wannamaker, and Carole Brown, Floradale School, Mississauga.

Storybook reading also exposes children to the symbolic power of language – its potential to represent experience in symbols that are independent of the objects, events, and relationships symbolized and that can be interpreted in contexts other than those in which the experience originally occurred:

The Rainbow itself was reborn more magnificently than ever.
Out of gratitude, it lifted up the flowers that had saved it and
transformed them into glittering dragonflies and butterflies and
splendidly plumed birds.²

This is not the language of everyday conversation, but is an example of the kind of “contextually disembedded” language that Margaret Donaldson has argued is necessary for success in schooling in that it permits the child to become capable of manipulating symbols and to deal with more abstract concepts and ideas.

While sharing books in class, the teacher may interact with the students and the text in such a way as to bridge the gap between text (where the meaning and intentions are fixed) and the child’s knowledge and experience of language and the world.

The story as a context for learning is an extremely effective means for children to make sense of their world. A story may be a vehicle not only for learning new things, but also for seeing existing knowledge and experiences in different ways.

The child uses his or her patterns of story – to provide the necessary framework of understanding – in two ways: to learn to organize new knowledge; and to see existing knowledge and experience in alternative contexts. Given this notion it is easy to argue that literacy is the key to all learning.

Consider the formidable task that confronts Grade 4 students who might be expected to develop a project about life in medieval times. It is very difficult for young children to conceptualize life in other times. It is necessary for the children to locate, list, summarize; to synthesize a large

2. U. De Rico, *The Rainbow Goblins* (New York: Warner Books, 1979).

body of new information; to place this new knowledge into the somewhat unfamiliar and abstract context of a project. Projects, essays, or other compositions are expected to communicate what the child has discovered and to organize this information in some way that tells, discusses, argues, and/or explains events that, in this case, occurred in another time. As teachers we are all familiar with the type of product that we might receive under such circumstances. There is a clear sense from the language that the child uses that the child has not made the knowledge, concepts, and ideas his or her own. Sentences and overall organization lack the cohesion that would suggest that the child has really assimilated much at all about the project.

Alternatively, consider this approach developed by teachers at the Floradale School in Mississauga, Ontario. At the children's suggestion they deal with time by travelling back to the tenth century in a time machine. "Travelling back", and representing this with a timeline, helps the children conceptualize their ideas of time. Having arrived back in medieval times, the children, in groups, are placed in the *contexts* of various stories.

If one were to view an elementary story structure as having four essential components – a setting; a lack or problem; a resolution; and a restoration to the original set of events – then in this case the children were given the setting.

As reporters from this age who have to gather information to complete a story, they were placed in such settings as a rural farm, a village, with the knights in a castle, or at a wedding at a castle. What is significant here is that the context in which they are to learn is one with which they are most familiar – that of a story. The macro-structure or framework within which they are to organize this information is totally familiar. As well, because they themselves are participants in the story, they are initially able to act upon this new information in a personal way, which is a necessity if they are to make it their own.

The following examples illustrate: (1) the central role that literacy plays in all learning; (2) the significant role storybook reading plays in helping children become literate; and (3) the idea that the children's knowledge of story may be used in a powerful way to provide the structure necessary for the learning of new information. If storybook reading leads to a knowledge of literacy practices and the nature of written language, then the stories that are read and the way teachers read these storybooks to children must also be of considerable significance.

In one method of storybook reading the story is not simply told or read; instead the children are able to interact with the text by sharing, questioning, comparing, relating, contrasting, and linking prior knowledge and experiences to the story. This interaction – or, if you prefer, participation – bridges the gap between the text and the children's existing knowledge and experience of the world and of literacy practices.

In some ways the interaction with the text may be seen as a type of scaffolding that supports the child in making sense of his or her world. If, in interacting with text, the child is able to bring experience to, and make meaning from, the story, then it may be argued that the text itself has provided the structure by which the child has made meaning.

In interacting with the teacher during story sharing time, meaning may be negotiated, developed, and extended by bringing experiences with other literature to the present story, as the following exchange suggests:

TEACHER: This is one of my favourite stories – *The Rainbow Goblins*.

Did anyone ever read or hear about goblins or this kind of creature?

CHILD: Yes.

TEACHER: What did you read?

CHILD: Goblins – greedy goblins.

CHILD: The one I read there was goblins and they can fly in outer space.

TEACHER: And I had another book about goblins – who can remember it? – Teepu?

CHILD: It was called *The Goblins*.

TEACHER: What kind of book was it?

CHILD: A pop-out book.

TEACHER: Was there any story in that one?

CHILD: The girl chases her brother all around the forest, and the boy sees all these creatures but the sister doesn't.

TEACHER: And refuses to believe that they were creatures.

In this discussion a context for the story is introduced. Jerome Bruner, who first introduced the term “scaffolding” in reference to mother/child interaction, identified reducing the degrees of freedom, concentrating attention into a manageable domain, and providing models of expected language as useful behaviours in adult/child interaction.

Stories come in various genres, each genre having its predictable patterns and structures that the children come to know through their experience with the genre (often through the storybook reading of the parent or the teacher). It is the experiencing of patterns and structures that develops the child's sense of story. In interacting with the children and the text, teachers can pause for a moment to enable the children to respond to the story by predicting the possible outcomes and so enhance their understanding of the plot and structure. Such pauses may simply be to ask, “What do you think will happen next?”

TEACHER: If I asked you right now to draw a picture of a goblin – how would you picture him in your mind? Just think for a moment – maybe close your eyes and try to picture a goblin.

(Various images are described.)

3. J. Bruner, “The Role of Dialogue in Language Acquisition”, in *The Child's Conception of Language*, edited by A. Sinclair; R.J. Jarvella; and W.J.M. Levelt (Berlin: Springer Verlag, 1978), p. 254.

TEACHER: Now we have an image of a goblin.

Why Rainbow Goblins? What could Rainbow Goblins do?

CHILD: Take the colours from the rainbow.

TEACHER: Take the colours from the rainbow? What else could they do?

CHILD: Make the colours.

TEACHER: Make the colours.

CHILD: Mix the colours.

TEACHER: Mix the colours.

CHILD: Eat the colours.

TEACHER (*enthusiastically*): Eat the colours.

CHILD: Disappear them.

TEACHER: Disappear them – good.

CHILD: Maybe they invented them.

TEACHER: Invented them.

All those are possibilities that we'll have a chance to explore either in a story or perhaps a play.

Maybe they changed them, maybe they made them disappear, maybe they rearranged the order, maybe they invented them. Let's find out what happens in the story.

Underlying the notion of scaffolding is the idea that whatever the child produces is acceptable. It is the teacher's role to mediate, not dictate. Efficient readers and language users use the strategy of predicting words and ideas that will follow what they have already read or heard. For instance, readers who have learned to predict form a hypothesis about what the text is likely to say in the next few words or sentences, and then read on to see if their predictions are correct. Sharing stories is a powerful way to foster prediction strategies.

Relating previous stories and books; contrasting and comparing plots, characters, and pictures; reading to children a series of books by the same author – these are all ways of having children come to know

authors and illustrators and enabling them to use this knowledge to predict the nature of the stories, the qualities of the characters, and the outcomes of plots.

Consider this discussion that took place after the reading of *Harald and the Giant Knight*, by Donald Carrick:

TEACHER: ...What other stories do we know that were like this one?

CHILD: *The Stained Glass Window*.

CHILD: *The Runaway Serf*.

CHILD: The one about the two kids who had to marry each other.

TEACHER: The two children that were betrothed. . . . Tell me about one that also had a knight in it.

CHILD: There was a knight in *The Stained Glass Window*.

CHILD: But he was a good knight – he was kind to his people.

TEACHER: What would it be like to live under a good knight?

CHILD: Well, a good knight would be interested in his people – he wouldn't take all their food like the knights did to Harald.

CHILD: The knight in *The Stained Glass Window* was a farmer – he liked to work on the land and be with his wife rather than to fight.

TEACHER: But he did go to the baron's castle each year to help defend it.

In this example the teacher tends to follow the children's lead. In providing scaffolding for the child's understanding, the teacher's participation must be guided by what he or she perceives to be *the child's intentions*.

Children strive constantly through their actions to make sense of their world and to construct a reality for themselves. Language may be viewed as an object of knowledge upon which children need to act and react in order to make it their own. When storybooks are read to children, the children need the opportunity to act on the author's text (on one or more of the content, the emotions, the language, the symbolism, and so forth) in order to make the story their own. This may be done in many ways, but most simply through the notion of placing the child into

the context of the story. A good example of this occurred during the interaction that surrounded the reading of *The Sea People*. In this story the people of two adjacent islands who enjoy very different values and lifestyles become pitted against each other as the more aggressive, materialistic islanders begin to take the earth from the smaller island in an attempt to extend their holdings and wealth.

At this point in the story the blind man speaks to the king of the larger island on behalf of his people:

The king screamed in fury, “The law of life demands order and diligence! We on this island have always obeyed the law. We have worked from early morning till late at night. You just live each day as it comes. You are lazy, idle good for nothings!” And he ordered his servants to carry him away.⁴

TEACHER: How did you feel when you found out that the king said you were “lazy, idle, good for nothings”?

CHILD (*immediately slipping back into role*): Well I don’t think it’s fair, we have no need to be working all the time. We have time to enjoy our friends, our mountains . . . the ocean . . .

CHILD: That’s right – why are you people always working all the time anyway?

CHILD: But if we do as the king says, look at the riches we will have – we’ll have treasure and big buildings, and our king will have . . .

CHILD (*excitedly butting in*): We don’t care about those things.

CHILD: How do you know that what your king says is right?

In this article I have argued for the importance of storybook reading in the development of children’s knowledge of literacy practices and have pointed out the centrality of literacy to all learning. The examples given show children responding to storybooks in a variety of ways that are likely to enhance their concept of story, their ability to use prediction strategies, their knowledge of written language, and their understanding

4. J. Muller and J. Steiner, *The Sea People* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982).

of its symbolic power. The teacher/child interaction described here shows, among other things, the teacher acting as a mediator, interacting with the child and the fixed meaning of the text to move the story closer to the child's level of understanding; the more skilled language user provides support for the child in developing complex linguistic abilities and meeting the accompanying cognitive demands. In view of this, I would invite all teachers to harness the power of story in their classrooms.

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"Would You Rather . . .":

Looking at Drama and Story



“Would You Rather . . . ”: Looking at Drama and Story

David Booth

John Burningham’s wonderful picture book *Would You Rather . . .* ¹ is a perfect vehicle for blending story and drama when working with children. It also provides a useful working model for an examination of the relationship between these two modes of learning. From the very first page, readers are inside the book, as the author invites them to make a choice from among three situations:

Would you rather . . .
Your house was surrounded by
water, snow or jungle

Immediately the children begin choosing the environment that conjures up in them the most vivid images. When I add, “You are living in your house in that place at this very moment. Tell me what it is like”, the element of dramatic involvement is introduced; the children spontaneously become a part of the literary fiction, identifying with their own particular vision of life “there and then” while working “here and now”.

Authors use this magic “as if” to draw the reader inside the life of the book, and drama works on the same premise. Children who have had experience in creating their own dramatized stories bring a greater sense of expectation to print, since the speculative nature of spontaneous role playing develops the child’s ability to think creatively, to examine the many levels of meaning that underlie each action, and to develop the “what if” element that is necessary for reading. Just as a story can affect the drama to follow, the learning experience in drama can increase the child’s storehouse of personal meanings, thus altering any meaning he or she brings to the text.

Because of the nature of my work, I generally meet a class of children once in a demonstration setting, and therefore I must choose books that draw from the children an immediate response, so that I can move

1. John Burningham, *Would You Rather . . .* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1978).

them into a situation where we can begin building the “as if” world of drama. *Would You Rather...* opens doors at once with children of every grade level. As I read and show the book, I stop every so often to let the children contribute their responses and feelings about the author’s ideas through storytelling and dramatic role playing. By questioning children as if they are in role, I can help them picture that world, and the role gives them the public voice with which to share the creations of their imaginations.

GRADE 1 CHILD: My house is surrounded by water.

DAVID BOOTH: Do you live on an island, or perhaps a houseboat?

CHILD: A peninsula, but you can’t get to the top end; it’s landlocked by a mountain.

DAVID BOOTH: Do you have a boat?

CHILD: Not a motor boat. No one in my family believes in them. We only use sailboats.

DAVID BOOTH: Well, what do you do if there is an emergency and there is no wind?

CHILD: There is a kayak, and I can paddle it very fast and go for help.
There is a boat ambulance on the mainland.

As I interact with the children, using their own ideas, I am able to help them to understand the consequences of what they are seeing and saying, and together we fashion their own imaginings into a personal, coherent story. Dramatic role playing helps the children go one step beyond identifying and empathizing with the story; they begin to use the story elements to structure their own thoughts, reacting and responding personally, entering as deeply as they wish into the new world of meaning. Through drama, they may move from the particular experience of

the story to a more general understanding of the nature of what is being explored, making explicit much of what is implied.

Would you rather be made to eat ...
spider stew, slug dumplings, mashed worms,
or drink snail pop

GRADE 5 CHILD: Snail pop.

DAVID BOOTH: Where did you get it?

CHILD: Me and my dad make it every summer. First, you catch the snails.
We invented these neat traps. Then you begin the process of
turning them into the drink.

DAVID BOOTH: How do you go about that?

CHILD: Well, it's all based on distillation. The important thing is that you
just use the essence of snail, none of the meat.

DAVID BOOTH: Why?

CHILD: It clogs the straws when you drink the pop.

DAVID BOOTH: And what do you put the pop in?

CHILD: Cans.

DAVID BOOTH: Why not bottles?

CHILD: Well, my dad and me used bottles once, but there was a problem. The night we did it, my dad woke me up at midnight, and he said that they were exploding all over the place because we had used too much yeast, and so we had to take all of the bottles into the back yard and bury them, so that no one would be hurt.

As this child built his personal story spontaneously in-role by storytelling, he used his own knowledge and background to elaborate upon the literary stimulus. Drama tells me what a child has taken from a story, so that I can help him or her examine and explore the possibilities of what has been read, heard, or viewed. Through such externalized representations as drama, children's perceptions are altered and expanded. As

students grow in dramatic ability, they improve their communication skills – grappling with experiences, playing out problems, and learning to use the conventions of the medium.

Would you rather ...
An elephant drank your bathwater
An eagle stole your dinner
A pig tried on your clothes
or a hippo slept in your bed

These delightful choices promoted much lateral thinking among the children. They hitch-hiked on each other's stories – elaborating, extending, and inventing scenarios that revealed the way in which children make sense of the ridiculous, building networks of meaning from each imaginative situation.

GRADE 1 CHILD: An elephant stole my bathwater.

DAVID BOOTH: Were you in the bath at the time?

CHILD: Yes.

DAVID BOOTH: Do you mean the elephant drank the dirty bathwater?

CHILD: No! Elephants just put the water up their trunk so that they can use it later on.

DAVID BOOTH: Was the elephant a pet, was it from the circus, or was it a wild one?

CHILD: It was the neighbour's.

GRADE 4 CHILD: An eagle stole my dinner.

DAVID BOOTH: What were you having for dinner?

CHILD: Every vegetable you can think of.

DAVID BOOTH: A pig tried on your clothes?

GRADE 2 CHILD: Yes, my jeans, my T-shirt, my socks, and my Adidas.

DAVID BOOTH: Why do you think it did that?

CHILD: It wanted to see me naked.

DAVID BOOTH: A hippo slept in your bed? Did it break it?

GRADE 1 CHILD: Yes, but it didn't mean to.

DAVID BOOTH: What did your mother say?

CHILD: Well, I was afraid to tell the truth, because I had been warned about having all of these zoo creatures in my room, and my parents had just bought me this new bed that had been smashed to bits.

DAVID BOOTH: So what did you say to them?

CHILD: I told the truth, because I knew that somehow they would understand.

DAVID BOOTH: You must have very fine parents.

CHILD: They're great.

When a child reads a story, it is the dynamic of narrative that propels him or her forward. Often in school we stress the ability to analyse after the story, rather than the skills of making meaning happen while in the interactive mode of reading, in other words, as the child is reading. Of course, teachers who are helping children to learn to read will have to develop strategies that help the child work inside the print mode, as he or she experiences the words. Drama can nurture this ability.

Would you rather ...
Your dad did a dance at school
or your mom had a fight in a café

These two pictures usually take the child on a different journey. In drama, there is the *self* that one begins with, and the *other* that one takes on, and the *role* is the result of this combination. At times, the *self* is the motive force of the drama, dictating words and action from personal background and from a particular value system; at other times, the *other* is dominant, presenting a complex source to explore through talk and drama. *Role* is the juxtaposition of these two parts, so that the learning is

viewed internally but from a new or different perspective. (It is interesting to note that the artist in *Would You Rather . . .* has the same child character appear in each picture, as if the same *self* were involved in each new situation.)

In working with this part of the book, I found that the responses from these two pages were filtered through the personal experiences of the children. Those who chose the dad doing a dance at school had interesting reasons for such a happening – raising money for the Home and School Association, cheering up a class that had done poorly on a test, taking part in an ethnic day's activities. No one was embarrassed; everyone seemed to think that it had been a positive experience for both the dad and the class. However, when they depicted in small groups the restaurant scene, there were many conflicting emotions, most of them centering on the mother and her actions in the café. Many children in their reconstructions defended the mother's actions, but all were embarrassed.

GRADE 5 CHILD: We were in the McDonald's restaurant. My mother was in line, when suddenly a man butted in front of her. Right away, my mother's boyfriend came up and told that guy to get back into line.

Story after story concerned wrongs being righted, tensions taking over reason, families in disagreement. The story triggered the playing out of many stored-up tensions. The *self* and the *other* were melding, and the children found themselves united in their feelings about the row. This intersection of the children's private worlds and the world of the story produces power for building comprehension and response. A resonant relationship is set up between the individual responses of the students and the story. The children begin interacting with the story in ever-widening ways, adding to their childhood gardens an awareness of the lives

of their classmates, the world of the author, and their new-found perceptions in-role. (Birmingham's Everychild is shown to be embarrassed in each situation.)

In a regular class with time to develop the situations, each of the ideas can be the beginning of a full-fledged drama lesson as well as a stimulus for word play and dramatic brainstorming.

Would you rather be lost . . .

In the fog, at sea, in a desert, in a forest or in a crowd

Each of these settings has been the basis for building a whole-class drama lesson. The dramas varied widely with the interests of the group. We have discovered missing cities arising from the mists of the past; we have been in lifeboats lost on the sea and have found an island from *Lord of the Flies*; we have searched for water in a desert, only to find it was controlled by an evil king; we have found in the forest a society of people who have lived underground for their entire lives; we have been lost in a crowd of aliens, unable to reveal our true identities until we could find someone we knew to be trustworthy.

Children learn to read through personal relationships, and the process of reading becomes an extension of these relationships. Children relate to the story in terms of their own identities, just as they do to their families, friends, and environments. Their stories have to fit with their own experiences and with the expectations of their communities. By responding to other people's cues and by receiving responses from them, children further establish their own identities, borrowing from others to see how their stories fit together. Children explore life through their own stories and those of others, creating their own unique narratives and ways of representing yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Would you rather . . .

Your house was surrounded by water, snow or jungle

A Grade 1 class had chosen their environments. Each child was demonstrating the difficulties and pleasures of his or her particular setting, and

I was observing them and gently prodding them with specific questions about the nature of their life styles. A child with Down's Syndrome was making angels in the snow, and, unsure of his abilities, I began asking him questions:

DAVID BOOTH: Is your house surrounded by snow?

Child nods affirmatively.

DAVID BOOTH: Do you like living here in the snow?

Child again nods yes.

DAVID BOOTH: Are you the King of Winter?

Child nods yes.

DAVID BOOTH: Then what are you wearing on your head?

CHILD: A crown of ice.

I would rather the children . . . wear crowns of ice in summer, have eagles steal their vegetables, let hippos sleep in their beds, take breakfast in balloons, and be lost in childhood gardens. As also, I am certain, would John Burningham.

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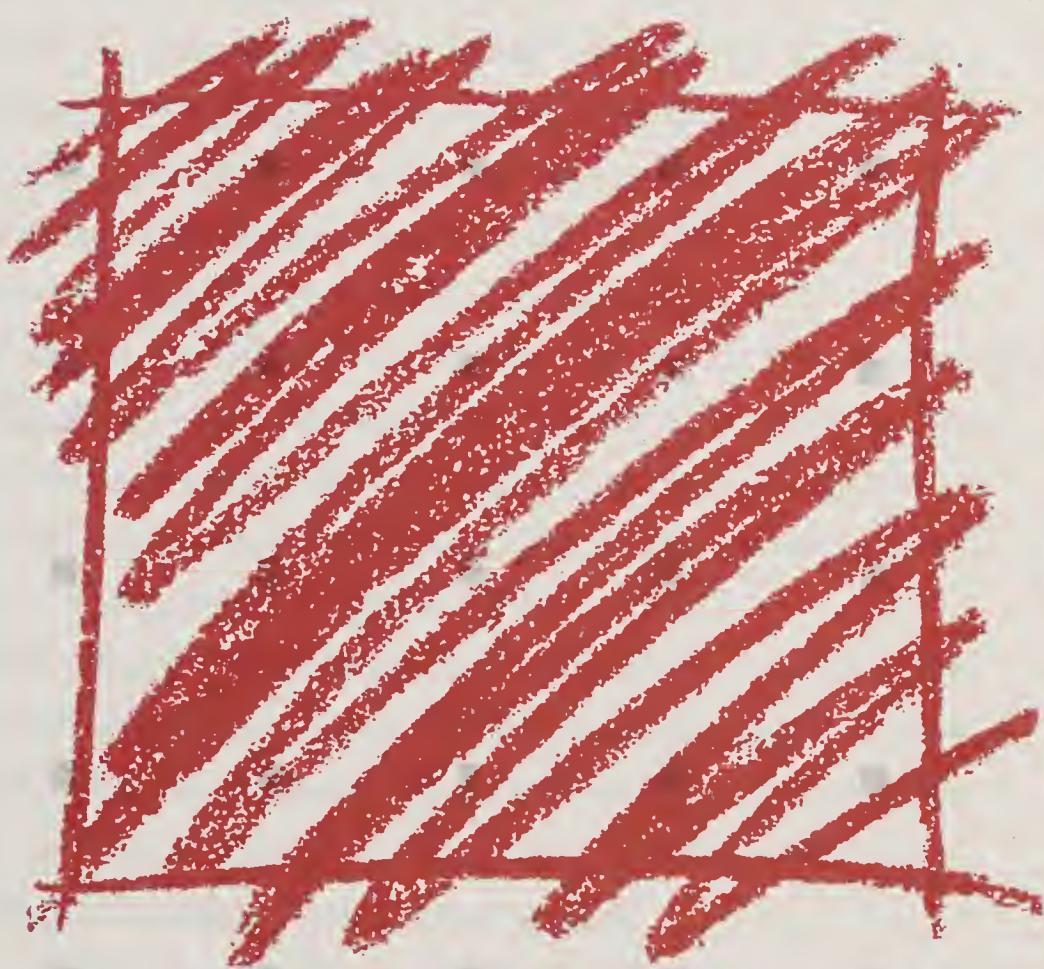
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Epilogue:

The Reader in the Story





Epilogue: The Reader in the Story

Lissa Paul

When you think about a reader as an active participant in a story – rather than a passive *voyeur* – then the discussions about stories you have with children are a far cry from those you have if you focus your attention on a fixed-form text with a sacrosanct meaning. In *Growing With Books* active reading is encouraged, reading that is about negotiating (instead of defining) meaning, reading that does not privilege the objective autonomy of the text, but acknowledges the reader's participation in it.

Instead of suggesting name-the-main-character/what-is-the-theme/finding-the-facts reading (skimming, really, not reading), encourage readers to wrestle with meanings between words, and meanings that are over, under, and beyond the words on the page. Challenge the text, question it, and argue with it. This kind of beyond-the-text reading is really a more rigorous form of what used to be known as “close reading”. It requires that the reader pay close attention to the words on the page, to the cadences and rhythms of sentences, to the meanings that are made between words as well as in words.

We want to encourage readers to puzzle over meaning, as Alice does when she gets a good lesson from the March Hare on what words mean – and don't mean. The March Hare points out to her that “I say what I mean” is not the same thing as “I mean what I say”. Then, to clarify the issue, he adds, “You might as well say . . . that ‘I like what I get’ is the same as ‘I get what I like’”. Which, of course, it isn't.

If you are responding with horror to such suggestions – don't. After all, David Booth and Paul Shaw make eloquent cases for just how effective such open approaches to stories can be. They ask “What would happen if . . . ?” or “Would you rather . . . ?” or “If you were a participant in the story, what would you do?” The children they write about enter into the drama of the stories and are not distanced from the text. If anything, they are able to grapple more completely with the delicate, human issues.

It is up to the teacher, as David Booth says, to enable children “to use the story elements to structure their own thoughts”, and to move

“from the particular experience of the story to a more general understanding of the nature of what is being explored”. Booth and Shaw suggest two basic routes for exploring stories: follow unwritten options and gaps in the story, filling in parts the author doesn’t tell, and/or become a participant in the story, preferably as a creator and performer in it – an actor in a reader-created drama.

The children Booth and Shaw write about are encouraged to imagine themselves in the picture that the author is creating, to imagine themselves as characters, to act in ways that enable them to respond to the demands of the plot, to anticipate what might happen next and why – and then to imagine the consequences of those actions. The children come up with stories of breathtaking strength and economy, stories that show depths of humanity, sympathy, courage, and understanding, stories that constantly astonish us.

David Booth’s example of the child who makes up a “Would you rather . . .” story about a mother jostled out of line at McDonald’s is especially wrenching: the mother’s boyfriend tells the guy “to get back into line”. The phrase carries within it a whole book of stories, a lifetime of stories about the child’s knowledge of human (especially family) relationships, power struggles, and good and evil.

It is difficult for us as adults, conditioned to the idea that children are innocent, to remember that children are actively engaged in defining the value systems that they will grow up into. They are testing out, playing, and performing acts that determine loyalty, courage, trust, virtue, honour, friendship; and they experience love and sorrow and hate and jealousy and envy. Just as we, as grown-ups, do.

One way to enable children to try out a range of human emotions and value systems is to introduce them to traditional – especially mythic, Greek, and medieval – stories and dramas. Through these stories children can discover for themselves just how like (and how unlike) our ancestors we are.

In a version of Euripides' *The Trojan Women* – enacted by school children – a twelve-year-old girl, as Andromache, wept and tenderly cradled the “body” of her five-year-old son after he had been thrown off the parapets off-stage. In that moment both children understood the truth of the tragedy. They participated in the feelings of jealousy and desire, misplaced loyalties, and uncontrolled passions that result in weeping mothers and dead children. They communicated that knowledge to the audience.

Another example. In a story-drama based on Donald Carrick's *Harald and the Giant Knight*,¹ primary-school children had to work out the problem that the protagonist in the story works out: what to do with the knights who are destroying the land that the peasants tend for their survival. The children in this school decided to handle the situation with a long-range plan. They decided to plant what, in spy-story jargon, would be called a “sleeper” or a “mole”. They appointed a child to apprentice as a knight, and subvert the established order from within. That is the kind of brilliant solution that demonstrates the capacity of children to understand the value of long-range planning. It also carries within it all kinds of implicit questions about morality, attitudes to the powers that be, obedience, standing up for your rights, and the like.²

In working with traditional Greek and medieval stories, children are able to see how we share the wishes, fears, and aspirations of those long-ago and far-away people. But traditional stories aren't the only way to enable children to negotiate the meaning of their existence, their being-in-the-world. Contemporary stories, as well, provide opportunities for self-exploration. Two stories that lend themselves to discussions about relationships between literature and life are: *From the Mixed-Up*

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1. Donald Carrick, *Harald and the Giant Knight* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1982).
 2. For further information on the use of drama in the classroom, see *Drama in the Formative Years: Curriculum Ideas for Teachers* (Toronto: Ministry of Education, 1984).

*Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*³ and *Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang*.⁴ Both are mystery stories – and they are about relationships between siblings and about running away. Both stories also provide lots of “What if . . . ?” points of departure.

In *From the Mixed-Up Files*, for example, “What if the children thought about how their parents would feel if their children ran away? What did their parents think about while the children were gone? What would you do if you were the parents looking for the children? Could you figure out where they might have gone? Where would you go if you wanted to run away from home? Why? Would you worry that your parents might be worried? Could you quiet their fears? How? By living in the museum, are the children breaking the law? What would happen if they broke something?”

Jacob Two-Two could be used to raise the problem of justice. Although the Hooded Fang is revealed as a good guy in the end, he still has a lot to answer for. The children were, after all, locked up under pretty terrible conditions. So you might think about a trial for the Hooded Fang. Or you could think about all the other possible stories in the story. “Does being a member of Child Power help Jacob come to terms with the injustice of his littleness? What other adventures could Jacob have with Child Power?”

In thinking about these kinds of questions, the reader is put in touch with two further questions that are important to reading, talking, and writing: How do others feel in a given situation? and, How well does the writer of the story make the characters alive and true? This helps the child learn to “recognize and appreciate models of good writing”.⁵

As readers examine their own responses to a situation, they become conscious of the skill (or lack of it) that the writer has used under the

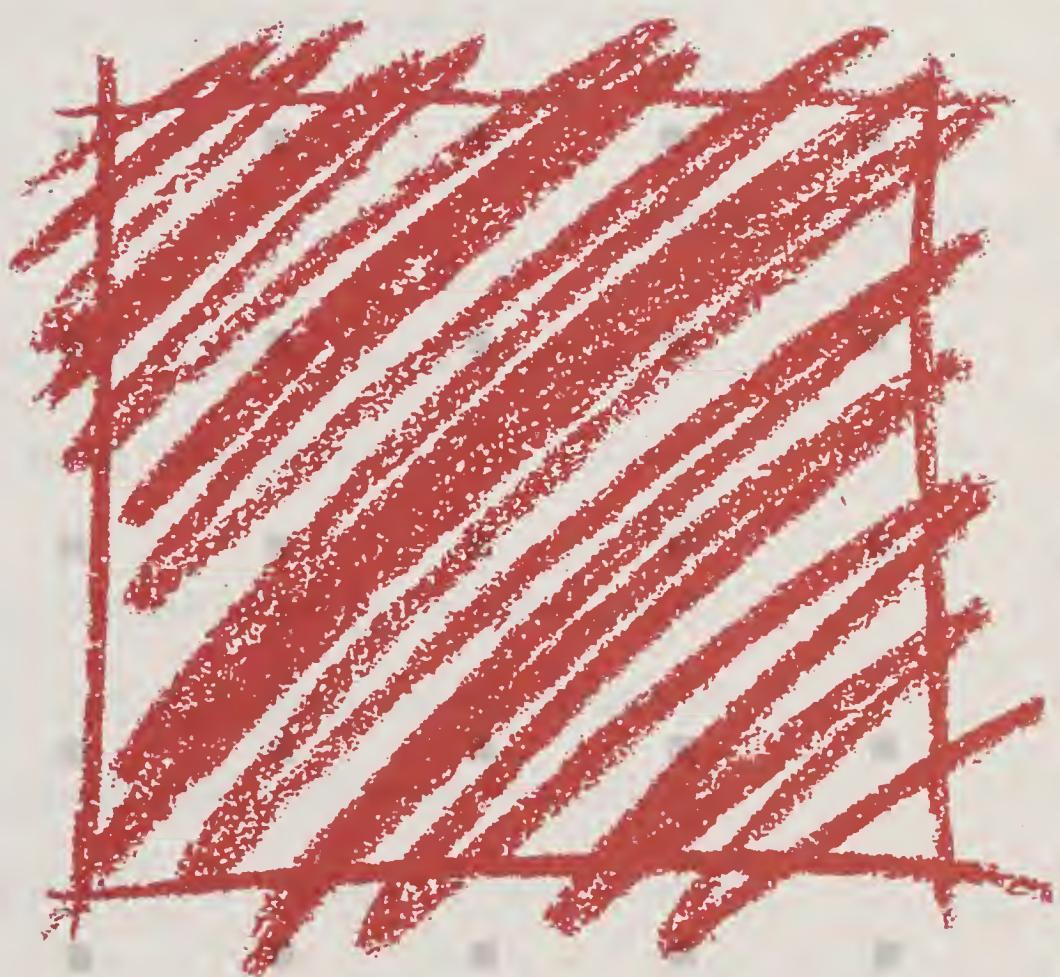
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4. Mordecai Richler, *Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang* (New York: Bantam, 1975).

5. Ministry of Education, Ontario, *The Formative Years* (Toronto: Ministry of Education, 1975), p. 15.

same circumstances. Has a writer made a wrong choice about the direction of the story or the development of the character? What is wrong with it? Only by getting inside the story can the reader find out. That is how skills in reading and writing – and imagining – grow. The ability to get inside the story is what makes it possible. As David Booth says, he would rather children “wear crowns of ice in summer, have eagles steal their vegetables, let hippos sleep in their beds, take breakfast in balloons, and be lost in childhood gardens”.

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Growing With Books

Book 5: Books to Grow With

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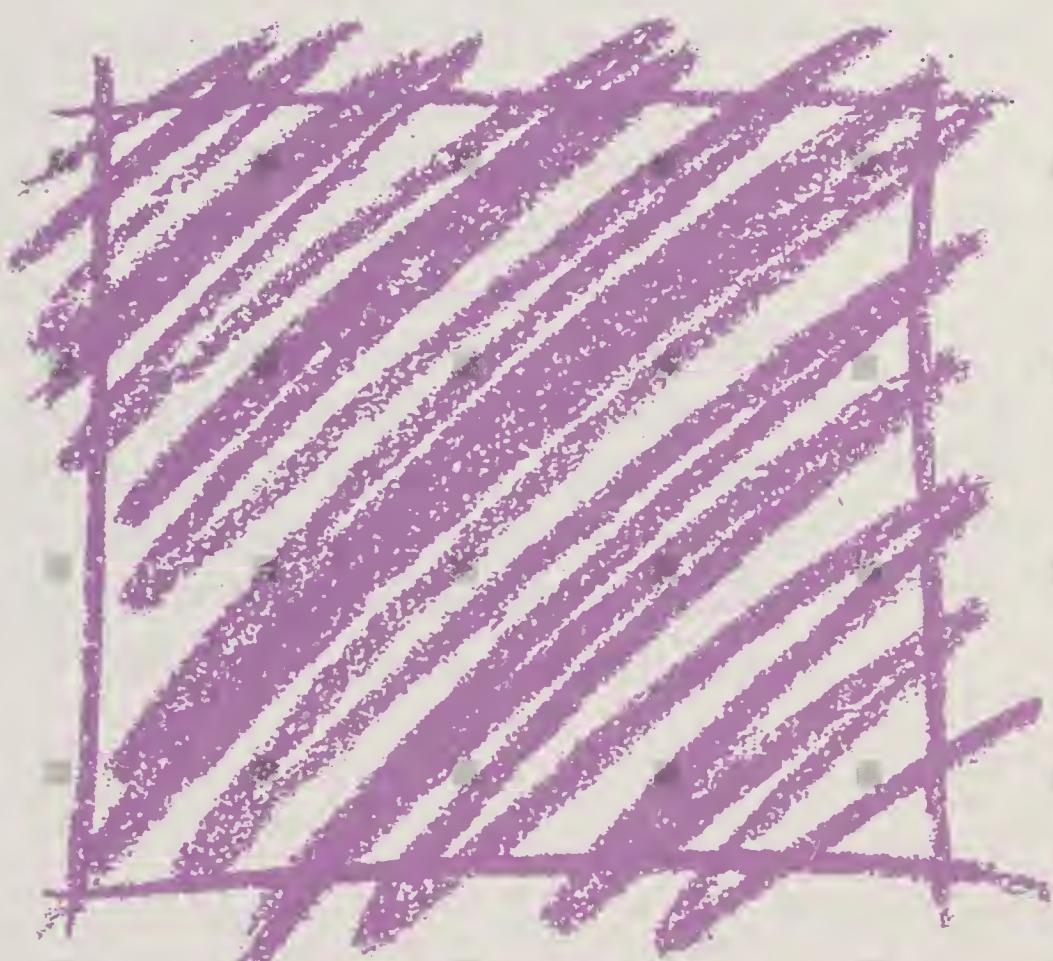


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Prologue:

Finding Books and Deciding What to Read



Prologue: Finding Books and Deciding What to Read

Lissa Paul

Stories tell us about ourselves, who we are, and where and how we live. Once we begin to think about reading as something to do with stories rather than with decoding, we begin to think about teaching reading in a different way too. Words on the page acquire more than just a sound/sense value; they have a human dimension. Words make stories – not just vocabulary or spelling lists – by real authors who have something they very much want to say to readers.

The authors of the articles in Book 5 of this series write in accord with the rethought approach to reading. They share ways of finding and disseminating a varied diet of literature – especially Canadian literature – in the classroom.

Judy Sarick, a former librarian and one of the best-informed people in the country on the subject of children's books, tells stories about the value of stories. She begins with a dramatic account of the way a child she knew used the story of Babar to make sense of a real event that had shattered the peace of her everyday life.

Barbara Park, who teaches teachers, states that the way to teach children to become better readers is to get them to practise reading. This means finding material that they want to read – not facile or trite material, but texts that are strong enough to engage their minds.

In "Our Own Words and the Words of Others", Part 2, David Booth and teacher Larry Swartz discuss how teachers can transform children learning to read into children reading to learn. They talk about the in-class techniques Larry uses – setting aside time for silent reading, bringing writers into class, using a writing journal – all of them designed to show new readers that reading is, in and of itself, rewarding. He doesn't resort to flashy non-reading "activities".

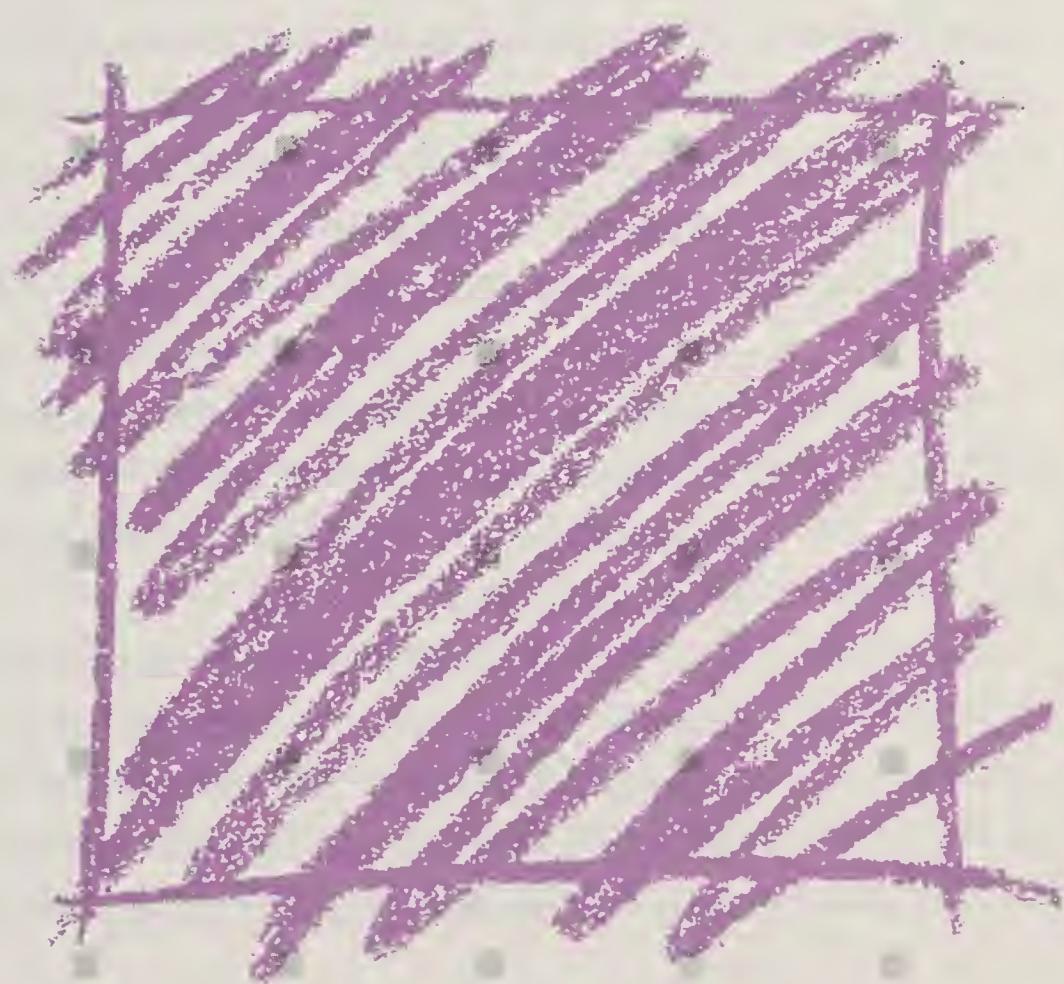
Kathy Lowinger, from the Canadian Children's Book Centre, promotes the use of Canadian children's magazines in the classroom. Not only are these magazines easily accessible and well written, but they bring images of Canadian landscape and culture into focus so children can make sense of their environment. Besides, as Lowinger says, magazines are made to be "folded, spindled, and mutilated" – and they are relatively inexpensive.

In "Canadian Novels in the Junior Classroom", Joan McGrath, a reviewer of children's books, makes a case for the way fiction can make history come to life. Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*, for example – about the internment of Japanese Canadians by the Canadian government during the 1940s – transforms a sterile historical fact into an emotionally and intellectually charged story. As McGrath points out, the story allows students to share the experiences suffered by the young heroine of *Obasan*, and so share in the knowledge of the injustices suffered by Japanese Canadians during the Second World War.

In sum, the writers in Book 5 of this series offer approaches to reading that make the work of learning to read worth the effort, so that children won't regard reading as something that only occurs in class. Children take responsibility for, and pride of possession in, stories they make their own – something they can't do with television.

To make books as available as possible, children might be encouraged to bring books from home for a class collection, or the whole class could troop down to the local library and choose books. There is an elegant brilliance to this approach. The children develop a sense of trust in their own taste and a sense of the value of books – books they want to read – in school, and out.

Finding the Right Book at the Right Time



Finding the Right Book at the Right Time

Judy Sarick

Once, early in my career, I learned an important lesson from a three-year-old. She had been watching “Mr. Dressup” on TV when the broadcast was interrupted by a news flash about the shooting of John F. Kennedy. The child, whose television viewing had been carefully monitored, was distraught. The following day, when she had calmed down, she told her mother, “President Kennedy was shot by the hunter, just like Babar’s mother.” This youngster clearly demonstrated to me that the real power of fiction lies in its ability to help us come to an understanding of ourselves and others who touch our lives.

As a classroom teacher there are many steps you can take to help children make meaningful connections between their lives and books.

The first thing to do is to read as many children’s books as you can. Read picture books, read folk tales, read poems, read novels, and read books of information. The more you read, the easier it will become to choose the books you want to use and the books you like to recommend.

When you have a wide reading background the comments of reviewers of children’s literature in magazines like *Signal*, *The Horn Book*, and *Canadian Materials* become more interesting and meaningful. As well, conversations with other teachers and teacher-librarians about children’s books can be stimulating and enlightening.

Buy lots of books for your classroom so that your students can have immediate access to good literature. These books should cover a wide range of topics and many levels of difficulty.

When you decide which of the picture books, poems, stories, and novels you like best you can share your pleasure by reading them aloud to the whole class.

Talking about specific books to the entire class can get them excited about reading. You can pick one important feature of a book and relate it to a shared experience or to yet another book. For example, Tommy in *The Genie of Sutton Place* hides at night in a museum,¹ as do the children in *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*.²

1. George Selden, *The Genie of Sutton Place* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973).

2. E.L. Konigsburg, *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* (New York: Atheneum, 1967).

One of the most effective ways to help children make appropriate choices is to talk to them individually. This can be more effective if you follow up on what you know the child has read or is interested in. For example, if you know that Susan is driving with her family to the West Coast, you might suggest she read *Hey, Dad!* by Brian Doyle.³

Listening to what the children have to say about the books they are reading outside the formal reading program shows that you respect their opinions; it can also give you wonderful insights into how well they are reading.

Class visits to the school library for book talks will reinforce what you are doing in the classroom. It will also give the children the benefit of another adult's reading knowledge and taste.

Class visits to the public library are another way to offer your students choice, variety, and exposure – key factors in the education of a reader.

Inside the classroom it is important to create a place where a child can read a book, see pictures in his or her mind's eye, and keep it all private; for reading is above all a solitary pleasure that can be enjoyed without electronic equipment or a special theatre or batteries or a partner. It is a pleasure that can last for a few minutes or several hours. It is an acquired taste that grows stronger with practice until it becomes a life-time habit.

Children of all ages are dependent upon adults to help them have these experiences, to enable them to find the right book at the right time. When I was a child (long before schools had libraries or even many books other than the assigned "readers") I went to Boys and Girls House at the Toronto Public Library and talked to my librarian, Miss Cooke. Every week she suggested books for me to read. Usually I liked the ones I chose to take; sometimes I thought they were awful and cast them aside after twenty pages. But every so often I read a book that was overwhelming; a book that lived inside me; a book that helped me understand or see

3. Brian Doyle, *Hey, Dad!* (Vancouver, B.C.: Douglas and McIntyre, 1978).

things I had never seen before. I can remember the emotions I felt to this day, although I would have a hard time telling you about the plots or characters. The house in *Madeline* haunted me until I found the book again when I was in my early twenties. *The Water Babies* and *Little Men* affected me more deeply than many of the books I read today. A friend of mine attributes her humanitarianism to her reading of the novels of E. Nesbit and to the librarian who first brought them to her attention.

When I became a children's librarian myself I learned that in order to bring children and books together you have to know a good deal about what is inside the books.

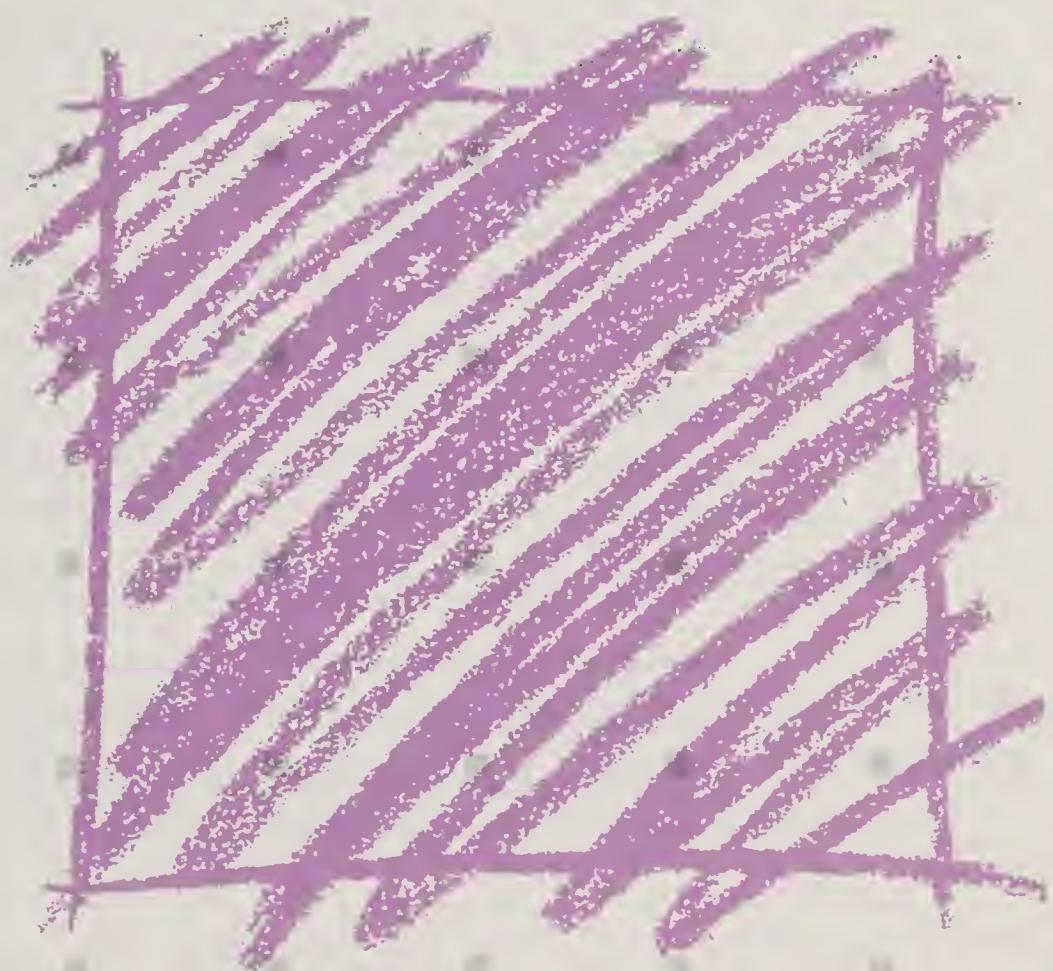
You also have to know children and be willing to listen to them. You have to build their trust so that they will not just borrow the book, but actually read it, then come back to ask you for another. When this happens it is a joy for you as well as the child.

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*Teaching Beginning Reading With
Children's Books*



Teaching Beginning Reading With Children's Books

Barbara Park

We have a tradition of teaching children to read with textual material which has been designed especially for beginning reading instruction and which in many cases is pretty dull stuff. Who would voluntarily read and reread such nonsense as "Come, come. Look, look, look!" or "The thin pin is made of tin"?

The joy and satisfaction of reading real stories is not something that should or need be postponed until young readers have acquired a basic "sight" vocabulary or specific phonics skills. Beginning reading can be taught very effectively using stories, poems, songs, and expository text from the best children's books available. The shift to reading independently (from being read to) is a gradual one.

In order to become competent readers, youngsters need lots of repetition and practice. Traditional materials for reading instruction have depended heavily upon vocabulary control, word drills, and workbook exercises to provide this repetition. The chances of inducing independent practice are much higher if the reading materials themselves attract the reader to return to them again and again.

Many children start school eager to learn to read independently because they have had powerful positive experiences with books during their preschool years.

These fortunate youngsters who have been read to regularly have already developed a repertoire of favourites that they have requested again and again. They know the pleasure that comes from good books and have experienced the joy and satisfaction of sharing them with others.

As they have watched and listened while being read to, and have explored books independently in their daily play, they may have memorized chunks of text – or even whole stories – and so may be able to identify many of the conventions of English stories.

Children who have handled books and talked about them are also more likely to understand terms that teachers sometimes take for granted, such as "page", "word", "line", and so on.

Most importantly, children who have been read to have high expectations of print and have developed a strong intuitive sense of how different types of text work. They can often predict the concept, phrase, or word that will come next in an unfamiliar story. Without these competencies, although children may be able to name words, they cannot really read; these essential understandings only develop out of broad and varied encounters with real books.

Children who have had extensive experience with books in their early years tend to make an earlier and easier start with reading and writing and have a clear advantage over those who come to us lacking this background. We must use teaching strategies and materials that take advantage of children's book experience where it exists and build that background where it is lacking.

In order to teach beginning reading with children's books, teachers need to understand the nature of the reading process and should be familiar with patterns of literacy development in young children. They should have access to a number of high-quality books (from libraries, bookstores, and the classroom collection), and should develop teaching strategies that are consistent with their new concepts and materials.

The teacher must understand that reading is not an exact process in which the reader identifies every letter, sound, or word. The reader uses the print and relates it to past experience to construct and predict meaning.

The first books for reading instruction should be selected very carefully. Above all, they must contain pieces of text that children will enjoy and want to read again and again. Motivation for reading must come

from the task itself, not from minimally related extrinsic rewards. High-quality material, and the satisfaction derived from reading it, provides the most effective sustained motivation a child needs to become a reader.

It is best to start with highly predictable picture books with only a few lines of print per page and a text that provides maximum support for the reader. Such support can take a variety of forms including rhythm or rhyme, repetition, familiar sequences or routines, and new renditions of well-known stories, poems, and songs. Illustrations should complement the text and help children predict what the print is going to say without telling the whole story.

Once: A Lullaby,¹ by bp nichol, is a good example of such a book. It starts:

Once I was a little horse, baby horse, little horse.
Once I was a little horse. NEIGH, I fell asleep.

The pattern is repeated throughout the book with a cow, goat, sheep, pig, cat, and other animals until the last page, which reads:

Once I was a little girl, baby girl, little girl.
Once I was a little girl. WAA, I fell asleep.

The pictures on each page help the children predict the name of the animal and the cry it makes; these predictions can then be confirmed by the appearance of the words.

It is important that children start with an understanding of the whole text, whether it be a story, song, poem, or expository selection, before they attend to the smaller constituent parts such as words or letters.

Shared reading introduces new readers to the situations, images, vocabulary, and complex sentence structure of written language. A shared reading session has clearly defined components and starts with

1. bp nichol, *Once: A Lullaby* (Windsor: Black Moss, 1983).

the children rereading a number of favourite stories, songs, and poems they have enjoyed together in the past. Next, the teacher introduces an exciting new book to the children by reading it aloud with all the drama and enthusiasm a good reader can muster. The youngsters follow along in a "big book" or individual copies of regular-sized books. They are encouraged to listen, enjoy, and predict, and to join in the reading whenever they feel they know what is coming next. Repetition and practice follow, with multiple readings by groups and individual children supported by the teacher in much the same manner as group and individual readings of language-experience charts.

After the children and teacher have read old favourites and then the new book together, it is time to focus on some particular aspect of language instruction to which one of the books lends itself.

Good stories enjoyed together also provide rich opportunities for children to write, draw, and dramatize, to expand their depth of understanding of the text. Bland and boring reading material makes it more difficult for the teacher to come up with good ideas for extending the reading experience.

An essential component of shared reading is the independent reading of the books that have been read together. This cannot be left to chance; nor should it be something the children do only if and when other work is completed. It must be a regularly timetabled daily activity. During this period the children may read aloud to each other in pairs or small groups, read along while listening to a tape of a story, read with the teacher, an older child, or a parent volunteer, or read alone. They may select from the growing collection of books that have been shared during instructional periods; or they may read other books available in the classroom library. The primary objective of this period is to log time reading from high-quality books.

Obviously, in order to run a beginning reading program based on good children's literature one must have lots of books. The acquisition of a large and varied classroom library should be a priority for every Primary teacher.

There are many ways to collect such a library; if several approaches are used it is surprising how quickly a good collection can be made.

School librarians can be very helpful in assembling collections from the main school library that can be held in an individual classroom for a few weeks.

Many school boards have diverted funds that were formerly allocated for the purchase of consumable workbooks to the purchase of paperback trade books. They have assembled collections to be rotated through several classrooms over the course of a year. Many schools are suggesting that funds raised by parent organizations could be used to purchase classroom paperback libraries.

Public libraries hold sales several times a year to clear shelf space for new acquisitions; at such times, good used children's books can be purchased at very modest prices. Many teachers also find garage sales and used book stores a fine source of inexpensive books.

Families are often willing to lend books to their child's class for a period of several weeks on the understanding that the teacher and children will take the best possible care of the borrowed materials.

Children's book clubs offer an inexpensive opportunity for teachers to supplement the class library (and also give parents and children easy access to good-quality paperbacks at reasonable prices). Book clubs must be handled very sensitively by the teacher so that children do not feel pressured to buy or left out if they are unable to purchase books. Many teachers use the free bonus books to make sure that every child experiences the pride and satisfaction of owning books.

The rewards are high for children who learn to read with the best books available.

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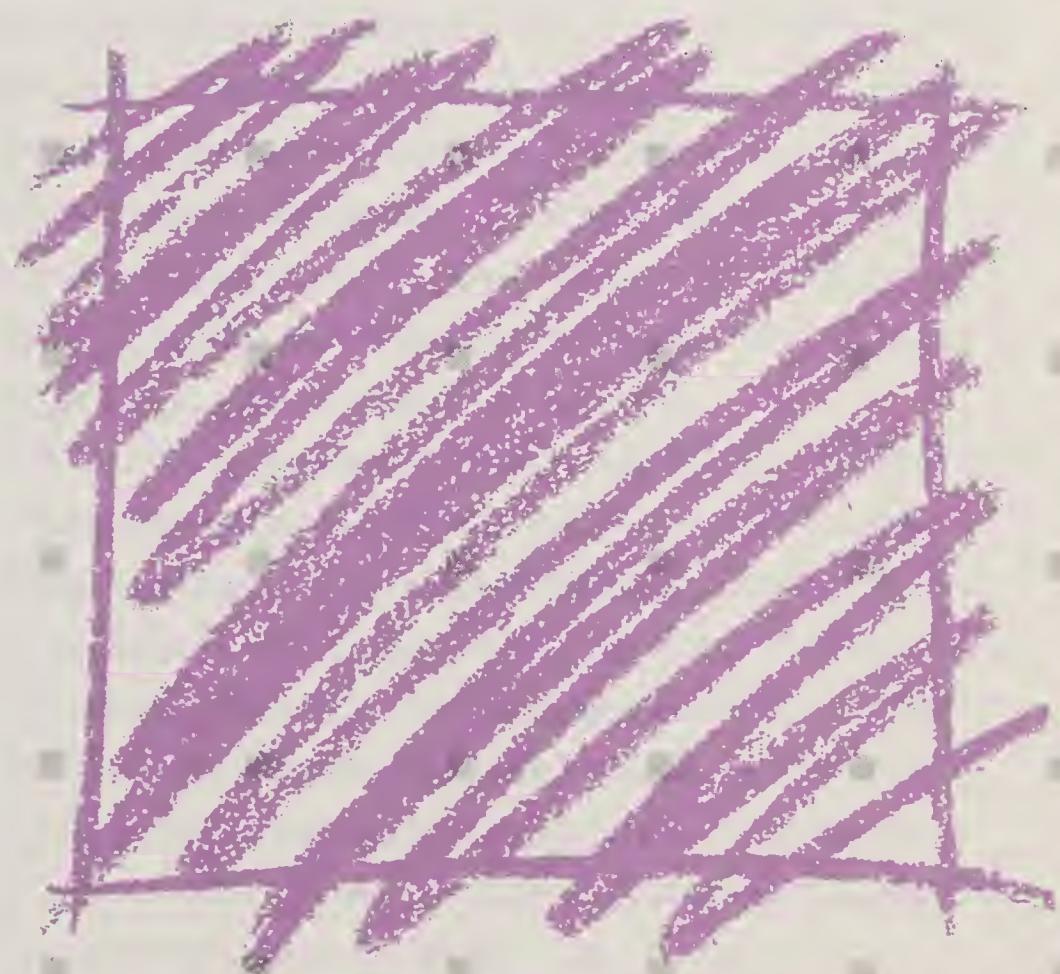
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Canadian Novels in the Junior Classroom





Canadian Novels in the Junior Classroom

Joan McGrath

All Canadian school children should be reading Canadian literature. It is difficult to imagine anyone thinking it necessary to suggest that British children should read British children's books, or that American children should be exposed to American children's literature from time to time. Some things, surely, may be taken for granted.

The very different situation here is complicated by our relationship with these two great producers of excellent books for children. Canada, a relative newcomer in the field, is sandwiched between two friendly giants both producing a wealth of very tempting and attractive material for children, almost all of it in one of our two official languages, competitively priced, and marketed with the skill of long experience.

Many of the imports from Britain and the United States have great charm and beauty. However, attractive though Canadian educators may find the glossy delights offered by foreign publishers, it is crucial that they bear other considerations in mind when they come to buy.

First, and this is beyond argument, it is important that Canadian children be made aware of their own proud land and its heritage. "Made aware" rather than "kept aware", for Canadian teachers must cope with the confusion of children who refer to "our President", or who believe that their nation's capital is Washington, D.C. Many Senior students know a great deal more about the politics and personalities south of the border than they do about what is taking place in their own country. The culture of the United States is, after all, what they have absorbed through endless hours of television.

What other nation allows its children to hear the praises of other countries endlessly reiterated without ensuring that they are first made aware of the beauty of their own land? Generations of school children grew up with Arthur Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons*, awed by the wonders of England's Lake District and knowing nothing of the unrivalled beauty of Canada's own landscape.

Even a couple of decades ago, teachers had some excuse for bypassing Canadian literature in favour of more glamorous stuff. Of such sparse Canadiana as was to be found (apart from the immortal *Anne of Green Gables*), almost all had to do with wild animals and snowy wastes. Though excellent in their way, few of these were suitable for beginning readers, or of compelling interest to Junior students. If the selection for Junior readers was poor, the selection for Primary readers was even worse. The most Canada-conscious of teachers had nowhere to turn for assistance.

Now, happily, all that has changed. Several thriving new Canadian publishing houses are busy producing a wealth of excellent books for children and are finding and promoting Canadian work that appeals to youngsters at all levels of sophistication.

How often have teachers in all subject areas heard the exhortation, “Begin where the students *are*, and build from there”? Well, where Canadian students *are* is in Canada. Canadian towns and cities and the Canadian countryside have their own distinctive flavour, which is not identical with that of the United States, quite apart from such details as police uniforms, flags, and the shape of mailboxes. Children feel secure with what is familiar to them. They face quite enough novelty in leaving home for part of the day for the first time, beginning school, and learning to read, without tackling other unnecessarily unfamiliar things at the same time.

Now, with Canadian school curricula strongly weighted in favour of Canadian content, Canadian novels for young people are a splendid means of fleshing out the bare facts of courses in social studies, history and contemporary studies, geography, and natural science. There can be little doubt that the works of Farley Mowat are more effective tools for ensuring that students absorb and retain information about the Arctic than the most exacting and exhaustive chart-and-chalk lessons ever devised. Why? Because the adventurous young protagonists of his novels are personalities with whom young readers can identify.

Farley Mowat's *Lost in the Barrens*¹ has made an entire, all-but-unexplored part of the country very real and vivid to thousands of students who themselves may never visit the Arctic. Students become absorbed in the adventures of Jamie and Awasin, sharing their perils and triumphs, while painlessly acquiring a considerable amount of meticulously researched information about survival in the Arctic. Even if these youngsters never set foot in the North, they will have shared vicariously in an Arctic experience they will never forget.

Only Canadian literature can be expected, or trusted, to address specifically Canadian themes and issues. American literature, for example, is rich in stories of its War of Independence; but only Canadian works are likely to explore in any detail the plight of the Loyalists who left what was no longer their home to come to Canada. Our children must be made aware of the Canadian perspective on the events of the War of 1812 and its cloudy conclusion. They need to read the Canadian version of the stories of those hardy souls who pioneered, rather than receiving the impressions of those who wrote, usually from a safe and comfortable distance, of the rough-spoken colonials abroad; they deserve to hear the tales of Canada's own Native peoples as told by the original storytellers.

We as Canadians have much to be proud of, and some things to regret most bitterly. It is important for our students to realize and share both pride in a nation that waged war in a just cause and regret for the injustice inflicted on Japanese Canadians during the Second World War. As the reader develops empathy for the feelings and fate of a single, representative individual, compassion grows towards a whole group that was previously just a mass of unknown people. This experience of compassion must surely have an effect upon the reader's thinking and behaviour in the future.

1. Farley Mowat, *Lost in the Barrens* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1956).

If we are indeed, as we so often advocate, attempting to build a national identity, a shared Canadian children's literature is the ideal place to make a start. Expo '67 demonstrated conclusively the power of a shared experience to contribute to a sense of oneness and community; Expo belonged to all of Canada, and all of us were proud. A shared literature of childhood can be another such unifying influence. Reading, hearing, and learning to care about other Canadian youngsters helps children to feel that they, too, have a place and a stake in their own country.

Most of the youngsters in our schools – and many of their parents and teachers – have a narrowly regional view of Canada. This is not surprising given the country's vastness; but that is all the more reason why we should introduce our youngsters at an early and impressionable age to the realities and richness of life in a multicultural and multiracial nation. Canadians are a far-flung people, thinly spread over an enormous and challenging country. A child whose home is in a crowded apartment block in a metropolis may well find it difficult to realize a kinship with children who live in lonely cabins on the edge of the habitable land; but that same child will have no problem whatsoever in reaching out in sympathy to the main character of *Mary of Mile 18*.² She is real, human, child-size; and her dilemma is comprehensible.

Similarly, a child living on a remote reserve may find the concept of crowded urban life difficult to grasp, yet will be in full sympathy with the troubled urban children in *The Minerva Program*.³

All of us, but children in particular, tend to fear and distrust the unknown. Literature has a role to play in helping to break down the barriers of strangeness that cause so much unnecessary friction among our peoples. Depending upon the circumstances of their lives, some of our children may seldom meet anyone very different from themselves in

2. A. Blades, *Mary of Mile 18* (Montreal: Tundra Books, 1971).

3. C. Mackay, *The Minerva Program* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1984).

racial origin, religion, culture, or socio-economic status. Though achieving a thorough mix of youngsters in all our schools is not possible, students can at least meet one another at one remove, in our country's literature.

It is possible for a child to know and to care about a fictional character, human or even animal, with deep and sincere feeling. No one could doubt this who has heard children speculating about and sharing their hopes for the future lives of Liza and Julilly, the girls who fled from slavery to freedom in *Underground to Canada*.⁴ They have become vividly real to many young readers.

Even more than adults, children like to be able to identify with a story's characters, however unlikely those characters' exploits. They enjoy reading about children of their own age who are recognizably akin to themselves. They like to feel at home with the settings of at least some of the stories they read, and not always have to strain to visualize foreign settings as though only elsewhere, impossibly far away, can adventure take place.

Where once Canadian children had almost no representation on the map of childhood literature, increasingly they are becoming ambassadors of goodwill both at home and abroad, where through international book fairs and the like, the "unknown country" is at last coming into its own.

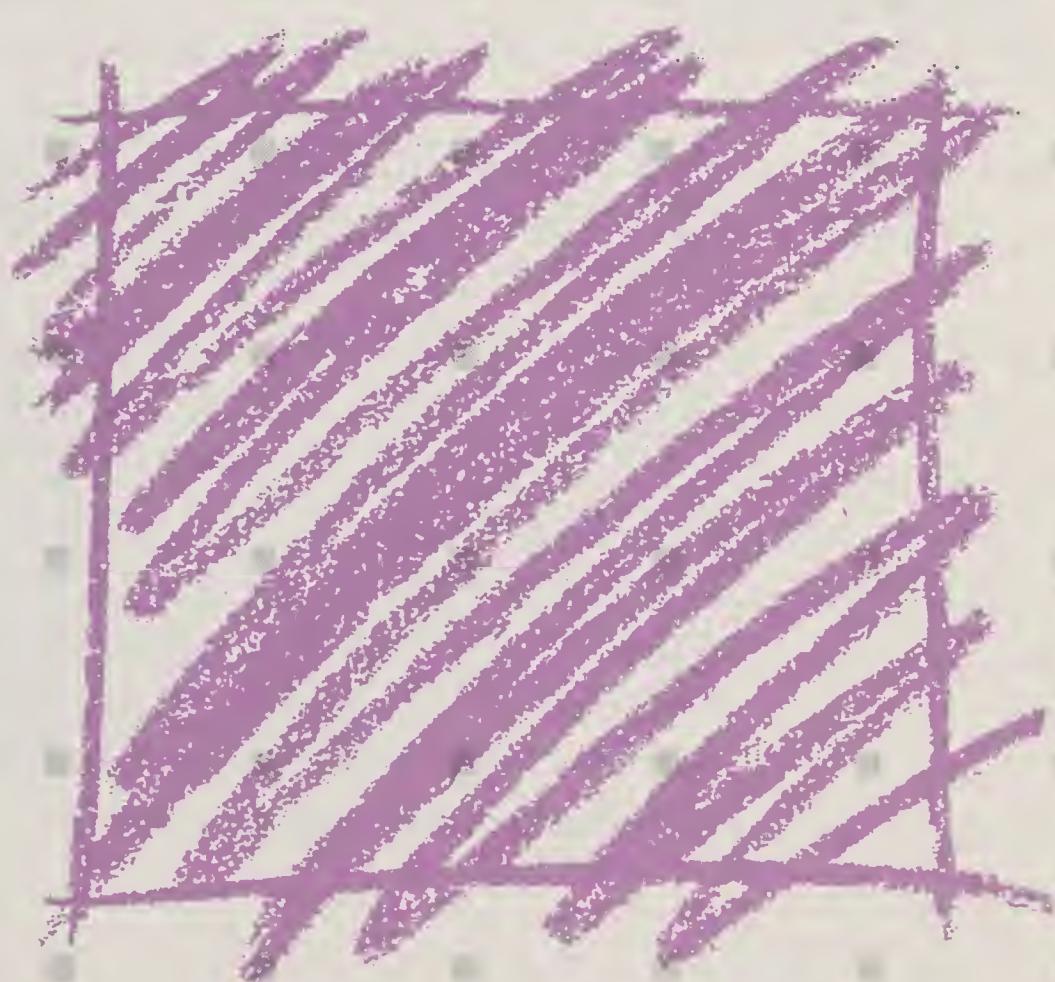
Lastly, and best of all the reasons for reading *Canadiana*, is the fact that there is an ever-increasing number of good books, written expressly, though not exclusively, for children in Canada. Buy, read, and recommend Canadian literature to Canadian children. Doing so serves not only the national interest, but the interests of education as well; and it makes good sense.

4. B. Smucker, *Underground to Canada* (Markham, Ont.: Penguin Books Canada, 1981).

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Canadian Magazines in the Classroom



Canadian Magazines in the Classroom

Kathy Lowinger

If you came across a horned sea slug, would you recognize it? Would you want to? You could and you would if you were one of the legion who are learning about the world through the pages of *Owl* magazine.

Owl and other fine Canadian children's magazines provide a combination of glorious visual images and accurate, current information. They are a valuable resource in any classroom.

Not too long ago, if a magazine appeared at school, it was relegated to recess reading, or it peeked illicitly from under a pile of texts. However, that changed in the mid-seventies. Several educators who believed Canadian children should have the chance to learn about their own country through the words and images of Canadians deliberately picked the magazine format because of its low cost, its balance of words and pictures, and its periodicity, which enables magazines to build and convey a long-term message.

Why Magazines?

Magazines are not just a stepping stone to real resources. They are themselves a real resource, sparking endless activity ideas. However, some caution should be observed in their use.

Magazines should not be regarded as throw-away books. They do not replace books, nor do they necessarily foster a taste for books. Few students will joyfully fling aside a copy of any magazine to announce, "Bring on the books." However, magazines may encourage reading. Because the images draw the reader's attention and provide explanation themselves, the words do not need to be watered down. In magazines, students can and do read beyond their expected level. The pairing of words and images and the compelling content make magazines attractive and accessible even to reluctant readers.

Magazines also offer extraordinary flexibility. A recent copy of *Chickadee* was devoted to covering the territory between A and Z – between aardvarks (and anteaters and armadillos) and zebras. The issue also included plenty of those magazine features you probably knew and loved in your own childhood, such as spotting the differences between two sets of pictures; mazes; connecting the dots; and comic strips.

Owl and *Chickadee* are available in French as *Hibou* and *Coulicou*, making them an asset for French immersion.

Their flexibility makes magazines a special boon to the integrated classroom. Students of varying abilities can be challenged while working at the same activity broken down into different tasks.

If you have always thought that magazines were not “serious”, it may be time for you to look again. They convey facts concisely, but with more detail than is possible in a newspaper. Canadian magazines are published with remarkable sensitivity. They are uniformly non-sexist. They avoid stereotypes of race, age, or ability. Whatever their focus, they give students a positive message: Despite real problems, the world is wonderful, it’s yours, and you have a responsibility towards it.

With such resources readily available, why are some teachers reluctant to use magazines? Attitude, timing, and cost may be some of the reasons.

Co-ordinating lesson plans with budget constraints and the timing of the magazine issues requires effort. To find articles in back issues of magazines, you can refer to the periodical indexes in the library. Information about upcoming issues may seem more difficult to find, but in fact it only requires effort and some planning. By writing to the publisher for the year’s list of features, a teacher can plan to incorporate magazines into lesson plans effectively.

Advance planning can also reduce the cost of magazines. Although a magazine is a relatively inexpensive item, having multiple copies in the classroom may seem like a pipe-dream. By contacting the publisher directly to pinpoint which issues will be required, *ad hoc* arrangements may be made for bulk orders at lower cost.

Activity Ideas

The best source of ideas for magazine use is the magazine itself. Suggestions can range from the zany and light-hearted (such as a game called "I Beg Your Pardo", which requires talking all day without using the letter "n") to the informative (such as matching up eggs with the insects they will become). Almost every activity is planned with a realistic understanding of the resources available to most teachers. There is no call for exotic, dangerous equipment of the "first-go-out-and-buy-a-vaporizer" school.

A magazine itself is a terrific physical resource. It can be coloured, filled in, cut up, or mounted on cardboard. All of us feel an understandable revulsion at the idea of mutilating a book, but no such taboo exists about magazines. In fact, they are designed to be folded, spindled, and mutilated.

Students can also get involved in the production of the magazine. Every magazine welcomes the involvement of its readers through letters to the editor, stories, drawings, poems, and article suggestions. *Owl* and *Chickadee* feature their readers' writing and artwork. Teachers can draw students into the complex and fascinating process of publication by inviting writers, illustrators, and publishers to meet their young readers.

The Magazines

Canada's small market and massive foreign competition make magazine publication a perilous undertaking. Many fine magazines – *Aboy*, *Mountain Standard Time*, *Canadian Children's Magazine*, *Jabberwocky*, *Magook*, *Jam*, and *Crackers* – have not survived. If the excellent magazines available to us now are to flourish, they require our support.

Owl and *Chickadee* are the best-known magazines for young people in Canada, with a combined circulation of 200 000. *Owl* is directed at children aged eight to twelve, and its fledgeling, *Chickadee*, at children aged four to eight. Both *Owl* and *Chickadee* are gorgeous to look at. The philosophy behind them is clear: this world is a wonderful place. If it is to survive, we need to learn to understand it and to love it. *Owl* and *Chickadee* entice readers far beyond the facts to the "whys". (A horse has eyes set high on its head. Why? To see what's going on even during grazing.)

The format deliberately remains the same, the better to provide a backdrop to ever-new content. *Owl* contains a newspaper, *Hoot*, which can be used as a model for a classroom paper. Regular features include the Mighty Mites (adventurers who learn about the world by shrinking), Dr. Zed, and a mystifying back-page puzzle. *Owl* and *Chickadee* understand the reader's sense of humour and are well-stocked with plenty of groaners. (Why is bread like the sun? It isn't light until it rises.)

Owl (ISSN 03-8266-2-7) and *Chickadee* (ISSN 07-0746-1-1). The Young Naturalist Foundation, 59 Front Street East, Toronto, Ontario, M5E 1B3.

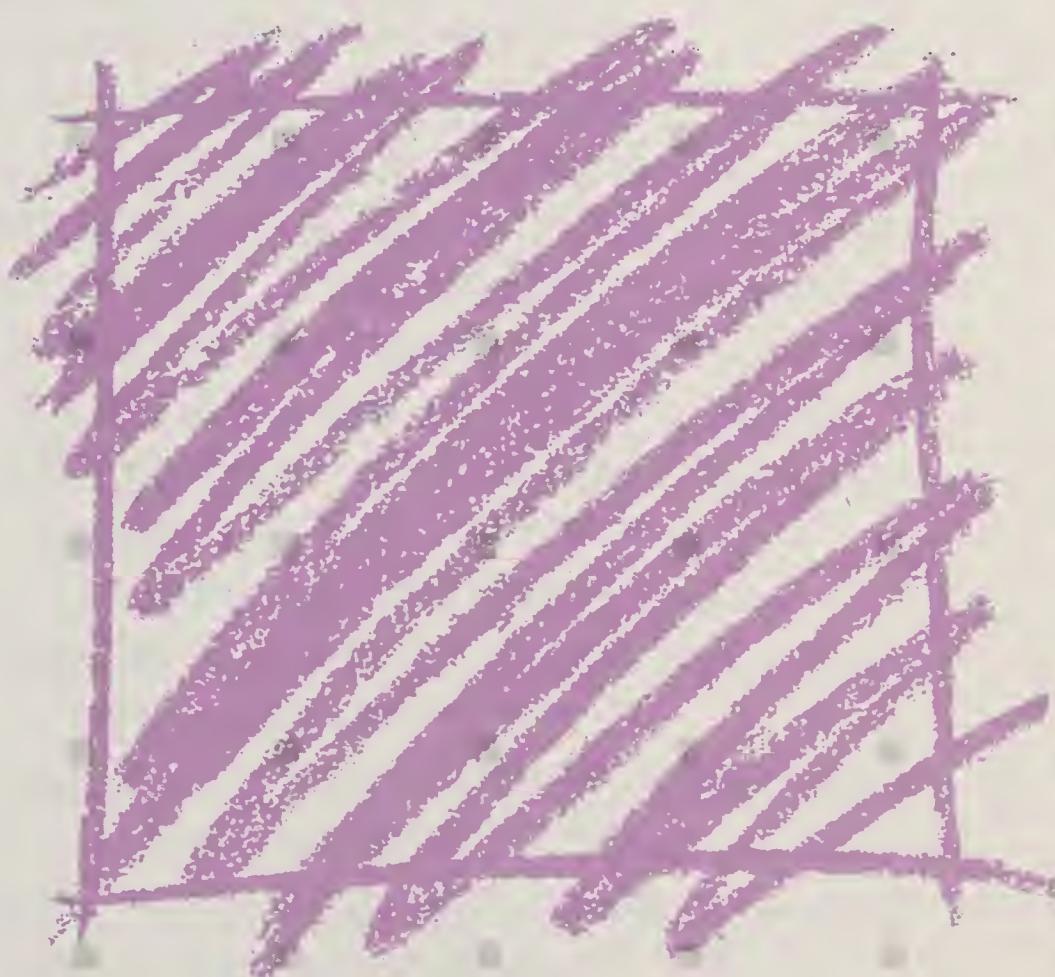
Why Canadian?

Owl and *Chickadee* are as good, as exciting, and as attractive as any magazines you will find anywhere. They deserve attention on their merits, not merely for nationalistic reasons. It is also true, however, that they

can give Canadian students the chance to read about themselves not as bystanders to someone else's culture, but as the central figures in their own culture. The hurdles to be overcome by every Canadian magazine are considerable: the market is small and spread over vast distances; competition is heavy (*National Geographic*'s magazine for children, *National Geographic World*, spends more than \$600 000 on promotion in Canada – more than the total budget of some Canadian publications!); and advertising revenues are small. Given a chance, Canadian magazines can compete where it counts: in quality, imagination, and challenge. They belong in our children's lives.

Our Own Words and the Words of Others

Part 2



Our Own Words and the Words of Others, Part 2

David Booth and Larry Swartz

Children in the Junior Division, Grades 4, 5, and 6, engage in a wide variety of reading and writing activities. Much of the work can be individualized and much can also be based on personalized reading. In Larry Swartz's program there is a lot of shared reading, listening, and writing time, as the discussion that follows makes clear.

D.B.: When you read collections of stories, novels, poems, and articles and share pictures from picture books, what do you hope the children will gain?

L.S.: I hope that my reading aloud to the children will help them acquire an image in their minds of what the literature has done, and find something that they can relate to in the story: the characters, the conflict, or the issues in the story.

D.B.: What do you hope all the children will take from the discussion that follows?

L.S.: I like them to respond to the characters or decide on some alternative solutions to a problem in the story, so that when they write they will perhaps explore different points of view.

D.B.: Do you use picture books in the Junior grades?

L.S.: The picture book is concise. I can read it in a short space of time and then develop it for a long period of time – a day or a week.

D.B.: So then it becomes a vehicle for shared listening and viewing. Do the students chant, join in, read along with you?

L.S.: If the books have a pattern I sometimes have them join in with me. Sometimes it might be a poem that we share together as a class, or they could work with a partner or in a small group.

D.B.: How much of your work is individualized, and when do students choose their own material to read?

L.S.: They make their choices about what to read each day. If they don't wish to choose a novel, I have a selection of picture books in the classroom. If they want to read a magazine they may do so.

D.B.: Do you allow them to read any magazine they want, as opposed to a "good-quality" novel?

L.S.: I prefer them to read a novel, and they do, for the most part.

D.B.: What about those students who just won't read a novel?

L.S.: Either I let them read a short story or choose a book. They can go to the library and look at non-fiction materials. If they want to read a book about hockey during the reading time, they may certainly do so.

D.B.: What do they do with the books they read?

L.S.: When they finish it they conference with me and tell me something they've enjoyed about the book.

D.B.: Do they ever share with the class the books they've read?

L.S.: Yes, a great deal. After reading time, I might say, "Who is reading something good today? Would you like to tell us about it?"

D.B.: Do you read the whole novel aloud?

L.S.: Generally I read parts of the novel.

D.B.: How many novels (or parts of novels) do you read aloud to your students during the year?

L.S.: At least twenty.

D.B.: So you read one every other week, basically? What kinds of dramatic ideas emerge from the novels read in class?

L.S.: One of the most successful ways to get students into a novel is to have them take on the role of characters in the novel and then interview one other. Role-playing the characters, they probe each other about the story. Through role play they understand the problems that the character or characters in the story might have.

D.B.: Do you ever do a book that isn't related to a theme?

L.S.: Yes. I might say, "I've just found a wonderful book I want to share. I want your opinion."

D.B.: Do you read the book right through or stop in the middle?

L.S.: Often I stop in the middle, particularly when I'm working on a new drama, to find out what they are thinking. I sometimes don't get to the end of the picture book.

D.B.: In your classroom, then, you have two kinds of reading. You have private novel reading and then public listening and reading time. What types of novels do the children like hearing you read excerpts from?

L.S.: I start the year by reading novels with animal characters. For example, I started this year by reading Beverly Cleary's *The Mouse and the Motorcycle*.¹ That was just a fun story that they probably could have read on their own, but then it inspired them to read other Beverly Cleary books; it inspired them to read other books about Ralph the Mouse – there are three or four in the series – but then they started to write stories about Mouse and his motorcar, Mouse and his airplane, Mouse and his helicopter. They had great fun, and I could always refer back to Ralph the Mouse whenever the students or I wanted to talk about an issue or use it as an example.

Sharing their views in discussion increases students' appreciation and sensitivity. Some books, such as *The Magician's Nephew* by C. S. Lewis,² make students want to read more and find out what happens. It's a good cliffhanger book. The students and I read the first book in the series and the students will then want to read the rest on their own. As a matter of fact, the students made a point of collecting the C. S. Lewis books last year after I read them *The Magician's Nephew*.

Abel's Island by William Steig is another interesting novel;³ it's a story about a mouse who's trapped on an island. I found that the children talked about such things as survival and what matters in life. They went much deeper by sharing their thoughts. *Tuck Everlasting* by Natalie Babbitt also talks about living forever.⁴ When I introduced the book, I asked who would like to

1. B. Cleary, *The Mouse and the Motorcycle* (New York: William Morrow, 1965).

2. C. S. Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew* (London: Bodley Head, 1955).

3. W. Steig, *Abel's Island* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1976).

4. N. Babbitt, *Tuck Everlasting* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1976).

live forever, and many hands went up. They thought the idea was very appealing, but this book brings out some of the things that we wouldn't have by living forever.

Another theme I used was "getting along", a friendship theme, and I talked about a book by my favourite author, Robert Newton Peck.⁵ That led me to *Stone Fox* by John Gardner,⁶ which really intrigued the children. It's the story of an Indian and a boy who takes care of his grandfather. They found it very exciting and also very moving. It's very rewarding when the students are moved by a story that is being shared by the whole class.

I found *The Book of Three* series by Lloyd Alexander⁷ a bit difficult for the Juniors; but if you read aloud a book that they might not pick up and select on their own, students can be helped to appreciate a more difficult novel.

"Author of the month" is another idea that works in the classroom; for example, when I am reading a book aloud to the class, such as *The Pinballs* by Betsy Byars,⁸ Betsy Byars becomes the author of the month. We have a list of her books on the board, and a shelf of Betsy Byars books in the classroom; students also select others from the library. If they seem to enjoy *The Pinballs*, I have a few other books about foster children that might intrigue them, such as *The Great Gilly Hopkins* by Katherine Paterson.⁹

Another way of encouraging students to respond that's been very successful is the writing of diaries – where they become the character in the story. Trying to understand the

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5. R. N. Peck, *Soup on Wheels* (Toronto: Random House, 1981).
 6. J. Gardner, *Stone Fox* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980).
 7. L. Alexander, *The Book of Three* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964).
 8. B. Byars, *The Pinballs* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977).
 9. K. Paterson, *The Great Gilly Hopkins* (New York: Avon Books, 1978).

problems of the character, students talk about the problem as if they were that character.

They could also read a portion of the book to the class and become one of the characters, with the class asking questions of the student playing this character. Through role-playing, the students learn more about the story, and I learn what the students understand.

D.B.: How do you keep up on so many new novels?

L.S.: I make frequent visits to children's bookstores, and I try to find out from other teachers what books are being enjoyed by their classes. I collect books on a particular theme that we are studying.

D.B.: What about the library?

L.S.: The librarians have been very supportive in providing books when they know that I am working on a theme. As well, I can send the children to the library to look for books by other authors with the same theme.

D.B.: Do students read non-fiction with you? How much reading do they do in the other programs of the curriculum? Do they read, for example, in social studies or in science?

L.S.: When it comes to non-fiction material, I want them to gather information, and I want them to use and share the information. Byrd Baylor, for example, writes excellent natural science material.

D.B.: What about reading tests?

L.S.: I don't use them in my classroom, and I don't use them for report cards.

D.B.: How do you know, then, at the end of the year, what to put on a child's record card? What do you tell students about their reading ability? Do you have a sense from what they've read all year what their ability is? Is that the idea?

L.S.: Yes. For example, is their interpretation literal, or have they identified some of the issues and made inferences? In my board we are required to give generalized reading tests, and that's another tool I might use for general assessment. One thing the kids see about me

from the start of the year is that I love books and that reading matters. What's rewarding for me is to see this happening in their own lives. I start book clubs, and then I find the students are buying their own books. We visit bookstores and they select their own books. In the year that I spend with them, they develop their own libraries. The parents verify this, and say that the kids are always interested in having books of their own. I encourage them to share their books with a friend. We have a "readathon" in the school program, too, which has been a great stimulus, because the kids want to read a great deal over a certain period of time.

D.B.: Is there a competitive side?

L.S.: I've heard that complaint, but it hasn't been a competitive thing because I never talk about it in terms of winning or losing. If you read one book in three weeks and somebody reads twenty, then you've got one book that's very special to you.

D.B.: Does the librarian give book talks?

L.S.: The librarian does some book talks with the students. He or she doesn't work with the whole class, but will talk to some of the children about certain books that they might want.

D.B.: Are these informal rather than timetabled class visits?

L.S.: Yes.

D.B.: And does the class have structured visits to the library as well?

L.S.: Only if we are working on a particular research topic.

D.B.: Do they have opportunities to meet authors?

L.S.: Yes, through a program I initiated at my new school. We are going to be having the poet sean o. huigan visit; we are also going to meet Gordon Korman. Bernice Therman Hunter wrote *That Scatterbrain Booky*.¹⁰ I'm hoping that she'll make a visit to the class. Because I attend workshops and visit bookstores I have some autographed books that are dedicated to the class.

D.B.: Do you set aside a special time of the day for reading?

10. B. T. Hunter, *That Scatterbrain Booky* (Toronto: Scholastic Books, 1981).

L.S.: Again, that was established and made important to the children at first – that every day we would have silent reading time. This year they did it first thing in the morning. They came in and selected the book before the opening exercises, and then they read for fifteen or twenty minutes. Today I asked the students whether they would like the morning or the afternoon and they chose the afternoon, to finish the day with reading. But they definitely hear a story from me every day or part of a novel. They always read silently every day. And, of course, they always write something every day.

D.B.: Do you use any commercial basal texts in your classroom?

L.S.: I only choose stories from anthologies that relate to a theme. I start at the beginning of the year using basal readers and let the students choose the stories they want to read.

D.B.: During an individualized reading time?

L.S.: I meet in a group and discuss questions or issues that emerge from the story.

D.B.: How does spelling or vocabulary improve from either your shared or private reading time?

L.S.: When I read aloud to them, I'll stop on a word and we might discuss it; they then might find that they want to use the word in a story they are writing.

D.B.: So they are picking up these literary words and patterns and using them in their own stories?

L.S.: Yes, and so when they come to a story they are reading they might question the word if it's important to the story. We had a chart on the chalkboard consisting of words that were familiar and that kept cropping up. Last year I had the students select a new word-of-the-day that they found in their story. We wrote them on the board at the end of the week. We talked about these words and what the meanings were.

D.B.: Do they do any private writing in journals? Or is all their writing “public”, in that it's given to you? Are you the only audience for their writing?

L.S.: No, they keep a writing folder. I can't have them share everything with me, so they get to choose what they want to share with me. While they are writing they love to share their writing with each other, so I encourage that. In this way, it becomes public.

D.B.: That's a good point. What accounts for the impact of reading on these children's lives? Is it the fact that you read, and they read, and they write? What causes the growth in a child's reading?

L.S.: The availability of books. In my classroom I make books available.

D.B.: Particular books for particular children?

L.S.: Yes.

D.B.: And is that the main thing, do you think? If books are there, will they all read?

L.S.: Yes. Because there are many varieties of books, and they can choose what they want to read. I can suggest books that they might want to read, but I never give a book to a student and say, "Read this", or, "I want you to read this." That won't matter to the students, and I think reading has to matter to them in some way; so instead I might find out their interests and suggest a book, or say, "Give it a try, three chapters, and let me know if it's a book that you want to pursue"; I do not present a book to the class and say, "You have to have this finished in three weeks, and we are going to have a discussion during the week." I let them choose what they read.

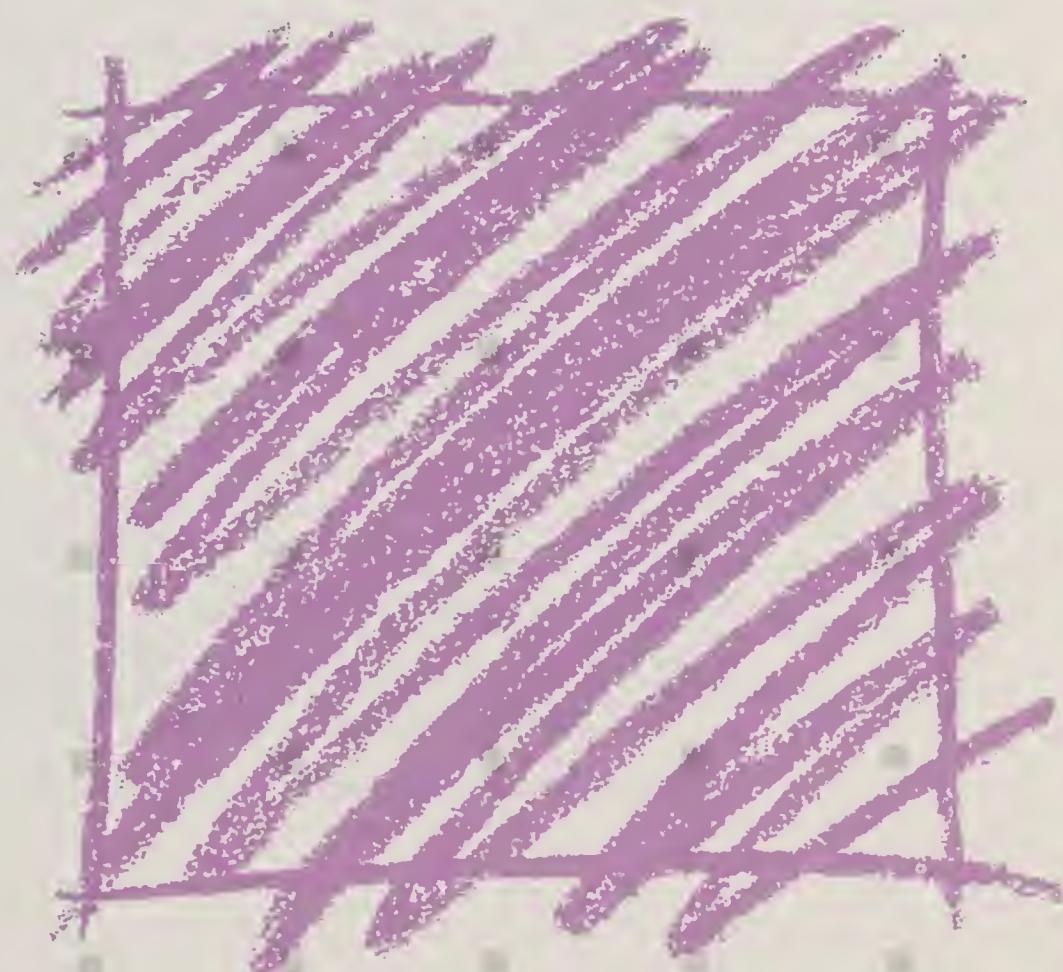
D.B.: Do your students do "oral reading"?

L.S.: I believe that students shouldn't be made to read orally unless they practice, either through choral speaking techniques or readers' theatre techniques, where students as a group decide how they are going to present the story orally. If they want to read a part to me, that's reading aloud, but the students never read aloud unless they have a reason for doing so. When we've finished our silent reading time, I'll say, "Turn to your partner and tell him or her what you've read, or read something that you want to read." I'll have them read it silently and then they read it aloud.

That's how Larry Swartz shares stories, and nurtures a generation of children who read because they want to, and because they know that books contain things they may want to know.

Epilogue:

For the Love of Language



Epilogue: For the Love of Language

Lissa Paul

Dinosaur-loving children can often spell (and say) words like “diplo-docus” with an ease and grace most adults find frightening. Other children know all the parts of an internal combustion engine; or the names of all the planets and stars; or the names of all the cars in a traffic jam. These children often make adults feel sheepish and incompetent, especially when those same adults insist on teaching reading from controlled vocabulary books.

Don’t underestimate the abilities of children – or their curiosity. If there is something they genuinely want to read, they probably will. Reading is, of course, not quite that simple. It is a complex cognitive activity requiring a myriad of fine skills. But, regardless of complexities, interesting stories encourage reading. To put the case the other way – why bother to learn how to read if the words don’t have anything to say?

Bruno Bettelheim tells a lovely story that illustrates this point.¹ It is about a six-year-old boy who attends both a Hebrew school and a secular school. In the Hebrew school the boy is required to translate Hebrew passages from the Old Testament into colloquial English. The Hebrew text is not abridged or simplified in any way.

The father of this six-year-old wants to show off his son’s skills to a guest. So he asks the guest to choose a chapter and verse for the child to translate. The guest asks for a passage from Genesis. The child reads the original and produces a creditable translation. Although the father hadn’t realized it at first, the text he had given his son had a translation on the facing page. So the guest asks if the child used the printed translation. The father thinks not. He asks the child to read the English. The child fails. He reads like an ordinary six-year-old in a Grade 1 class – for whom Genesis would be considered too hard.

Bettelheim’s tale tells the story. It is not that children can’t read difficult stories. It is that they are generally not expected to. The boy in the

1. B. Bettelheim and K. Zelan, *On Learning to Read: The Child’s Fascination With Meaning* (New York: Vintage, 1982), pp. 54-57.

Jewish school read Hebrew stories that connected him with the grown-up world and with people who treat the words in the story with reverence. Impoverished stories are unlikely to be treated with reverence. To encourage children to read, we must make sure that the stories contain something worth reading.

So far, only the importance of content-rich stories has been discussed. But the development of a love of language requires an appreciation of something more. It requires a love of not just the cadences and rhythms of the language we hear and use every day, but the rhythms of the dialects of other cultures; the language of playground chants and songs; and the stately, faintly archaic language of traditional and sacred stories. That is why it is important to read stories and poems aloud. A lot.

The power of poetry to mark the lives of the child protagonists of two stories comes to mind. In *The Great Gilly Hopkins*, Katherine Paterson notes Gilly's response to the "trailing clouds of glory" lines from Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood": "The music of the words rolled up and burst across Gilly like waves upon a beach."² And Anne of Green Gables, after casually telling Marilla that she can recite by heart "'The Battle of Hohenlin-den', 'Edinburgh after Flodden', and 'Bingen on the Rhine', and lots of 'The Lady of the Lake', and most of 'The Seasons' by James Thompson" (not poems usually considered suitable for children), adds: "Don't you just love poetry that gives you a crinkly feeling up and down your back?"³ Anne is supposed to be twelve when she says this.

Children who are exposed to well-wrought poetry and prose learn that books are more than just a collection of words that provide the right answers to questions. The children then don't just scan the text, they take the time to read the words one at a time, to explore the ways the

2. K. Paterson, *The Great Gilly Hopkins* (New York: Avon Books, 1978), p. 38.

3. L. M. Montgomery, *Anne of Green Gables* (New York: Bantam, 1976), pp. 40-1.

words connect to make sense, and the ways meaning shifts through unlikely collisions of words. And it is this kind of careful reading that enables children to remember what it is they have just read. Set texts in comprehension tests just don't match the power that can be conveyed by a real writer who has something he or she wants very much to communicate to a reader. And readers can't find that meaning unless they are engaged in the text.

As *Education in the Primary and Junior Divisions* notes:

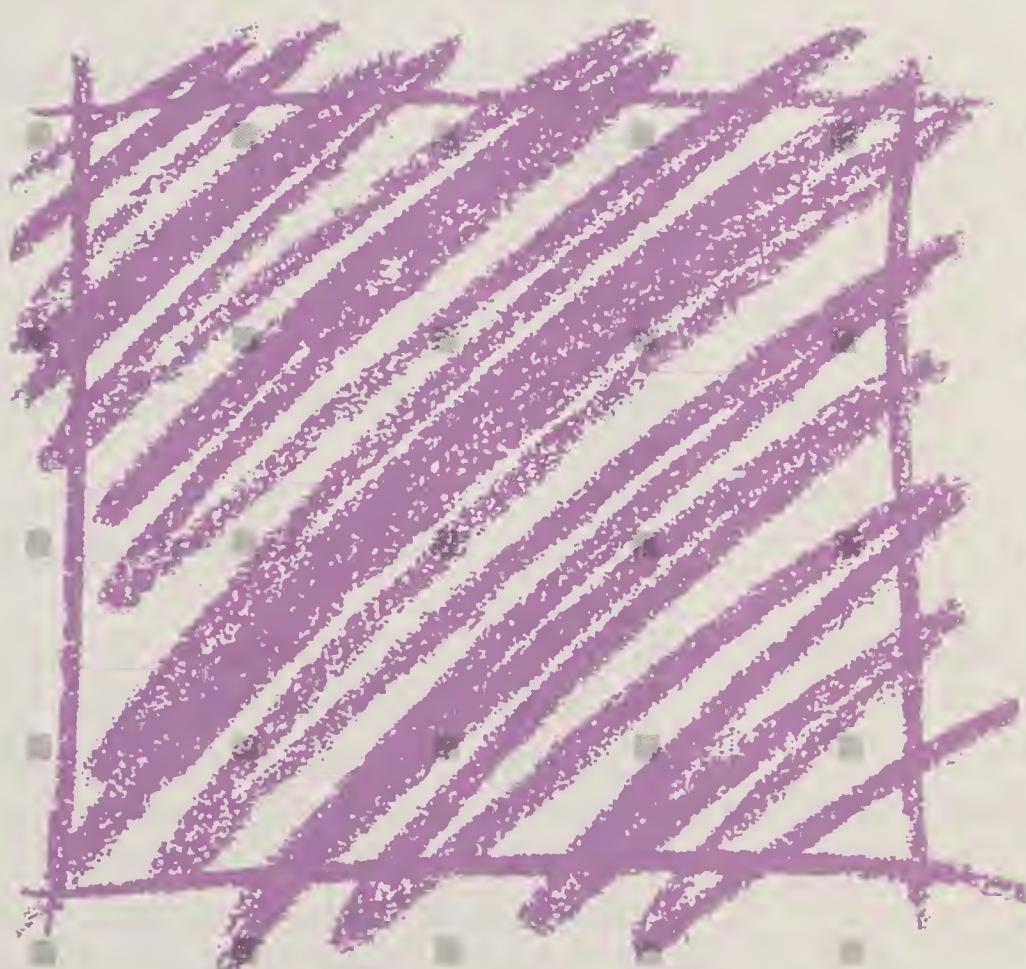
The Junior Division has been identified as the golden age of reading. In some cases, if children are not *hooked* on reading at this age, they will not return to it as adults. This is the age at which children develop personal reading interests and they should be given time to read a wide selection of materials. They need to be free to read without continual checks and formal testing of comprehension and vocabulary.⁴

Remember that stories are adaptable. Picture books are as suitable for older children as they are for younger ones. And quite complex myths and folk tales (particularly Greek myths and Arthurian legends) are loved equally by scholars and very small children. In fact, when a version of *Gawain and the Green Knight* was produced as a Christmas play by the National Theatre in England, it was advertised as being suitable for children from the age of six. So when you think about books for the classroom, try to strike a balance between classics and new books, realism and fantasy, Canadian books and books from other countries, different kinds of poetry, plays, fairy tales, folk tales, ballads, fables, legends, myths, Bible stories, adventure stories, novels, short stories, magazines, biographies, baseball cards, books about science and mathematics, and picture books.

4. Ministry of Education, Ontario, *Education in the Primary and Junior Divisions* (Toronto: Ministry of Education, 1975), p. 50.

In Ontario we are fortunate to have many bookstores that specialize in children's literature. We have good local libraries too, and good librarians. If you live in Metro Toronto you have easy access to local libraries, children's bookstores, and the Children's Book Centre. If you live in Madoc or Atikokan or North Bay, then your resources are very different and so are your requirements. Encourage your local booksellers to carry a wide range of children's books; and keep your school and community librarians aware of your needs. If you find a book you like, share it with your class, your colleagues, and your friends.

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- Leeson, R. *Reading and Righting*. London: Collins, 1985.
- Meek, M. *Learning to Read*. London: Bodley Head, 1982.
- Ontario Arts Council. *Arts/Education Catalogue*. Toronto: Ontario Arts Council.
- Reasoner, C. F. *Bringing Children and Books Together*. New York: Dell, 1979.
- Southgate, V., ed. *Extending Beginning Reading*. London: Heinemann, 1982.
- Townsend, J. R. *Written for Children*. Harmondsworth, Mx.: Penguin, 1974.
- Trelease, J. *The Read Aloud Handbook*. Harmondsworth, Mx.: Penguin, 1985.
- Tucker, N. *The Child and the Book: A Psychological and Literary Exploration*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.
- Waterland, L. *Read With Me: An Apprenticeship Approach to Reading*. Stroud, Glos.: Thimble Press, 1985.

Canadian Books for Children

One of the special things about reading a story about a place you know is that there is secret delight and secret knowledge in recognition – the streets, buildings, stores, trees, beaches, people, local gossip, in-jokes, whatever. It gives you a feeling of privilege and closeness to the author; makes you look at familiar things with new eyes; and allows for the possibility of magic in your own backyard.

The following list of books just hints at the depth and breadth of the range of available Canadian material. It is a deliberately idiosyncratic list – some favourites (like Mordechai Richler and Dennis Lee) have been omitted so that some less familiar authors (or less familiar books by well-known authors) can be brought to your attention.

Atwood, M. *Anna's Pet*. Toronto: James Lorimer, 1980.

Bilson, G. *Hockeybat Harris*. Toronto: Kids Can Press, 1984.

Carrier, R. *The Hockey Sweater*. Montreal: Tundra Books, 1984.

Dereume, A., and Zola, M. *Nobody*. Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 1983.

Harrison, T. *A Northern Alphabet*. Montreal: Tundra Books, 1982.

Hudson, J. *Sweetgrass*. Edmonton, Alta.: Tree Frog Press, 1984.

Hutchins, H. *The Three and Many Wishes of Jason Reid*. Toronto: Annick Press, 1983.

Kellarhals-Stewart, H. *Stuck Fast in Yesterday*. Toronto: Groundwood Books, 1983.

Kleitsch, C., and Stephens, P. *Dancing Feathers*. Toronto: Annick Press, 1985.

_____. *A Time to Be Brave*. Toronto: Annick Press, 1985.

- Kouhi, E. *North Country Spring*. Moonbeam, Ont.: Penumbra Press, 1980.
- Kovalski, M. *Brenda and Edward*. Toronto: Kids Can Press, 1984.
- Lunn, J. *The Root Cellar*. Markham, Ont.: Penguin Books Canada, 1983.
- Mackay, C. *The Minerva Program*. Toronto: James Lorimer, 1984.
- Munsch, R. *Thomas's Snowsuit*. Toronto: Annick Press, 1985.
- Reaney, J. *The Boy With the R in His Hand*. Erin, Ont.: The Porcupine's Quill, 1984.
- Seton, E. T. *Wild Animals I Have Known*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977.
- Stinson, K. *Red Is Best*. Toronto: Annick Press, 1982.
- Stren, P. *Sloan and Philamena*. New York: Dutton, 1982.
- Wallace, I. *Chin Chiang and the Dragon's Dance*. Toronto: Groundwood Books, 1985.
- Wynne-Jones, T. *Zoom At Sea*. Toronto: Groundwood Books, 1980.

Additional Books for Children

Throughout this resource guide, we have stressed the need to diminish age and grade barriers; it can, nevertheless, be helpful to have a list of suggested books classified roughly according to age range. But do not be constrained by the guide – and feel free to disagree.

Ages 6-8

Briggs, R. *Jim and the Beanstalk*. Harmondsworth, Mx.: Penguin, 1973.

Haley, G. *A Story, A Story*. New York: Atheneum, 1970.

Lobel, A. *Frog and Toad Together*. Harmondsworth, Mx.: Penguin, 1983.

MacLachlan, P. *Sarah, Plain and Tall*. New York: Harper and Row, 1985.

Martin, R. *Foolish Rabbit's Big Mistake*. Toronto: General Publishing, 1986.

Pinkwater, M. *Wingman*. New York: Dodd, Mead, 1975.

Richler, M. *Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977.

Turkle, B. *Do Not Open*. New York: Dutton, 1981.

Walsh, J.P. *Lost and Found*. London: André Deutsch, 1984.

Ages 9-11

Byars, B. *The Midnight Fox*. New York: Viking, 1968.

Chambers, A. *The Present Takers*. London: Bodley Head, 1983.

Cleary, B. *Dear Mr. Henshaw*. New York: Dell, 1983.

- Fitzhugh, L. *Nobody's Family Is Going to Change*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974.
- Heide, F.P. *The Shrinking of Treehorn*. New York: Holiday House, 1971.
- Kemp, G. *The Turbulent Term of Tyke Tiler*. London: Faber and Faber, 1977.
- Nesbit, E. *The Phoenix and the Carpet*. Harmondsworth, Mx.: Penguin, 1985.
- Pearce, P. *Tom's Midnight Garden*. Harmondsworth, Mx.: Penguin, 1976.
- Speare, E. *The Sign of the Beaver*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984.
- Treece, H. *The Dream Time*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1967.
- Ages 12-14**
- Bell, C. *Ratha's Creature*. New York: Atheneum, 1983.
- Desai, A. *The Village by the Sea*. London: Heinemann, 1982.
- Farmer, P. *Charlotte Sometimes*. Harmondsworth, Mx.: Penguin, 1972.
- Garner, A. *The Stone Book Quartet*. New York: Collins, 1982.
- Holman, F. *Slake's Limbo*. New York: Dell, 1974.
- Hunter, M. *The Stronghold*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1974.
- Martel, S. *The King's Daughter*. Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1980.
- Park, R. *Playing Beatie Bow*. Harmondsworth, Mx.: Penguin, 1982.
- Sutcliffe, R. *Song for a Dark Queen*. London: Pelham Books, 1978.
- Walsh, J.P. *A Parcel of Patterns*. Markham, Ont.: Penguin Books Canada, 1983.

Other Resources

Journals

Canadian Children's Literature
P.O. Box 335
Guelph, Ontario
N1H 6K5

Children's Literature in Education
111 Eighth Avenue
New York, New York 10011
U.S.A.

Emergency Librarian
P.O. Box 46258
Station "G"
Vancouver, British Columbia
V6R 4G6

The Horn Book Magazine
Park Square Building
31 St. James Avenue
Boston, Massachusetts 02116
U.S.A.

Language Arts
Department of Elementary Education
University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta
T6G 2G5

Quill and Quire
56 The Esplanade
Toronto, Ontario
M5E 1A7

Signal
The Thimble Press
South Woodchester
Stroud, Gloucestershire
GL5 5EQ
England

The Web: Wonderfully Exciting Books
The Reading Center
Ohio State University
200 Ramseyer Hall
Columbus, Ohio 43210
U.S.A.

Bookstores

The following bookstores that stock children's literature are listed by the Children's Book Centre. Bookstores are listed in alphabetical order by place and then in alphabetical order by name, if there are several stores in one city.

The Frog Prince
205 Dunlop Street East
Barrie, Ontario
L4M 1B2

A Different Drummer Books
513 Locust Street
Burlington, Ontario
L7S 1V3

Little Crow's Book Room
239 Huron Street
Collingwood, Ontario
L9Y 3Z5

The Bookshelf Café
41 Quebec Street
Guelph, Ontario
N1H 2T1

Stories
177 Woolwich Street
Guelph, Ontario
N1H 3V4

The Children's Loft
The Book Cellar
144 St. James Street South
Hamilton, Ontario
L8P 3A2

Books for Children
347 King Street East
Kingston, Ontario
K7L 3B5

The London Children's Book Shop
567 Richmond Street
London, Ontario
N6A 3G2

Robert Holmes Ltd.
248 Dundas Street
London, Ontario
N6A 1H3

Oxford Book Shop
740 Richmond Street
London, Ontario
N6A 1L6

Oxford Book Shop
Eaton Square
Wellington Street
London, Ontario
N6A 3N7

Bookcraft
183 Main Street South
P.O. Box 1051
Mount Forest, Ontario
N0G 2L0

Bibliography

Gulliver's Quality Children's Books 953 Pinewood Road North Bay, Ontario P1B 4P2	Sweet Thursday Bookshop 30 St. Paul Street Thunder Bay, Ontario P7A 4S5
Pick of the Crop Books 105 Dunn Street Oakville, Ontario L6J 3C9	The Albert Britnell Book Shop 765 Yonge Street Toronto, Ontario M4W 2G6
The Bookery of Ottawa 541 Sussex Drive Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6Z6	The Children's Book Store 604 Markham Street Toronto, Ontario M6G 2L8
Shirley Leishman Books Lower Concourse Westgate Shopping Centre Ottawa, Ontario K1Z 7L3	The Creative Child 47A Colborne Street Toronto, Ontario M5E 1E3
The Maple and the Butterfly 8 Spring Street P.O. Box 91 St. Jacobs, Ontario N0B 2N0	Lindsay's Books for Children The Colonnade 131 Bloor Street West Toronto, Ontario M5S 1L7
Oxford Book Shop Festival Square 10 Downie Street Stratford, Ontario N5A 7K4	Longhouse Bookshop 626 Yonge Street Toronto, Ontario M4Y 1Z8
Children's Book Shop 1544 Regent Street South Sudbury, Ontario P3E 3Z6	The Story Tree 502 Eglinton Avenue West Toronto, Ontario M5N 1A5

Storytale Lane
399 Roncesvalles Avenue
Toronto, Ontario
M6R 2N1

Tiddley Pom
43 Colborne Street
Toronto, Ontario
M5E 1E3

The Toy Circus
2036 Queen Street East
Toronto, Ontario
M4L 1J1

The Toy Shop
62 Cumberland Avenue
Toronto, Ontario
M4W 1J5

Willoughby's Book Store
3441 Yonge Street
Toronto, Ontario
M4N 2N1

Words Worth Books
88 King Street South
Waterloo, Ontario
N2J 1P5

Institutional resources

**The Canadian Children's
Book Centre**
229 College Street
Toronto, Ontario
M5T 1R4

Ontario Arts Council
151 Bloor Street West
Toronto, Ontario
M5S 1T6

**Ontario Federation of Indian
Friendship Centres**
234 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 207
Toronto, Ontario
M4P 1K5
(or the centre in your area)

Ontario Puppetry Association
171 Avondale Avenue
Willowdale, Ontario
M2N 2V4

Storytellers' School of Toronto
412A College Street
Toronto, Ontario
M5T 1T3

Toronto Public Library
Osborne Collection
40 St. George Street
Toronto, Ontario
M5S 2E4

